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THE MELBOURNE RING CYCLE 2013 OPERA AUSTRALIA

.....here's a delightful photo series by Jeff Busby.....

DAS RHEINGOLD



Warwick Fyfe as Alberich, Lorina Gore, Jane Ede & Dominica Matthews as The Rhinemaidens & the Sea of Humanity.



Lorina Gore, Jane Ede & Dominica Matthews as The Rhinemaidens & the Sea of Humanity.



Terje Stensvold as Wotan & Jacqueline Dark as Fricka.



Jacqueline Dark as Fricka, Hyeseoung Kwon as Freia, Jud Arthur as Fafner, Terje Stensvold as Wotan & Daniel Sumegi as Fasolt.



Jud Arthur as Fafner & Daniel Sumegi as Fasolt.



Jud Arthur as Fafner, Daniel Sumegi as Fasolt, Richard Berkeley-Steele as Loge, Terje Stensvold as Wotan, Andrew Brunsdon as Froh & Hyeseoung Kwon as Freia.



Richard Berkeley-Steele as Loge & Terje Stensvold as Wotan.



Graeme Macfarlane as Mime, Warwick Fyfe as Alberich & Opera Australia Chorus and volunteers.



Warwick Fyfe as Alberich.



Warwick Fyfe as Alberich in the Tarnhelm & Opera Australia dancers around as magician and assistant.



Warwick Fyfe as Alberich, Richard Berkeley-Steele as Loge & Opera Australia Chorus and volunteers.



Richard Berkeley-Steele as Loge.



Deborah Humble as Erda.



Terje Stensvold as Wotan & Rainbow Girls.



Jud Arthur as Fafner, Andrew Moran as Donner, Hyeseoung Kwon as Freia, Andrew Brunsdon as Froh & Richard Berkeley-Steele as Loge.



Andrew Moran as Donner, Hyeseoung Kwon as Freia, Jacqueline Dark as Fricka, Andrew Brunsdon as Froh & Rainbow Girls.

DIE WALKÜRE



Jud Arthur as Hunding, Miriam Gordon-Stewart as Sieglinde & Stuart Skelton as Siegmund. All photos by Jeff Busby.



Stuart Skelton as Siegmund.



Miriam Gordon-Stewart as Sieglinde & Stuart Skelton as Siegmund.



Susan Bullock as Brünnhilde & Terje Stensvold as Wotan.



Susan Bullock as Brünnhilde & Terje Stensvold as Wotan.



Jacquelin Dark as Fricka & Terje Stensvold as Wotan.



Susan Bullock as Brünnhilde & Terje Stensvold as Wotan.



Susan Bullock as Brünnhilde & Stuart Skelton as Siegmund.



The Valkyries: Elizabeth Campbell as Grimgerde, Roxanne Hislop as Rossweisse, Dominica Matthews as Schwertleite, Sian Pendry as Siegrune, Hyeseoung Kwon as Helmwige, Deborah Humble as Waltraute, Anke Höppner as Gerhilde & Merlyn Quaife as Ortlinde.



Susan Bullock as Brünnhilde & The Valkyries: Elizabeth Campbell as Grimgerde, Roxanne Hislop as Rossweisse, Dominica Matthews as Schwertleite, Sian Pendry as Siegrune, Hyeseoung Kwon as Helmwige, Deborah Humble as Waltraute, Anke Höppner as Gerhilde & Merlyn Quaife as Ortlinde.



Susan Bullock as Brünnhilde & The Valkyries: Elizabeth Campbell as Grimgerde, Roxanne Hislop as Rossweisse, Dominica Matthews as Schwertleite, Sian Pendry as Siegrune, Hyeseoung Kwon as Helmwige, Deborah Humble as Waltraute, Anke Höppner as Gerhilde & Merlyn Quaife as Ortlinde.



Susan Bullock as Brünnhilde & Terje Stensvold as Wotan.



Susan Bullock as Brünnhilde & Terje Stensvold as Wotan.

SIEGFRIED



Stefan Vinke as Siegfried.



Terje Stensvold as Wanderer.



Terje Stensvold as Wanderer and Graeme Macfarlane as Mime.



Warwick Fyfe as Alberich and Terje Stensvold as Wanderer.



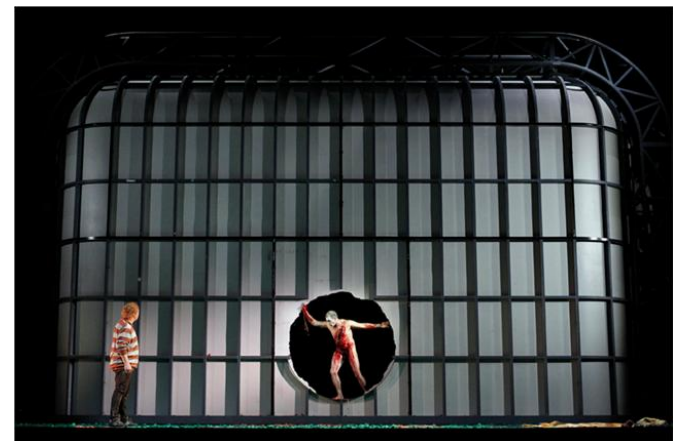
Jud Arthur as Fafner.



Jud Arthur as Fafner.



Jud Arthur as Fafner.



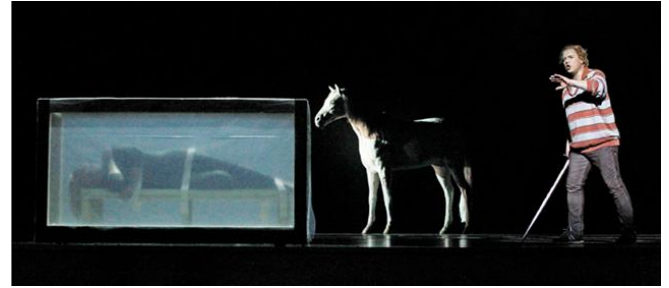
Stefan Vinke as Siegfried and Jud Arthur as Fafner.



Stefan Vinke as Siegfried and Jud Arthur as Fafner.



Stefan Vinke as Siegfried and Taryn Fiebig as Woodbird.



Susan Bullock as Brünnhilde.



Susan Bullock as Brünnhilde and Stefan Vinke as Siegfried.



Terje Stensvold as Wanderer, Deborah Humble as Erda and Elizabeth Oley (Erda double).



Susan Bullock as Brünnhilde.

GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG



Elizabeth Campbell, Jacqueline Dark & Anke Höppner as the Norns.



Barry Ryan as Gunther, Daniel Sumegi as Hagen & Sharon Prero as Guttrune.



Barry Ryan as Gunther, Daniel Sumegi as Hagen & Stefan Vinke as Siegfried.



Warwick Fyfe as Alberich & Daniel Sumegi as Hagen.



Susan Bullock as Brünnhilde



Susan Bullock as Brünnhilde & Sharon Prero as Gutrune.



Barry Ryan as Gunther, Daniel Sumegi as Hagen, Stefan Vinke as Siegfried, Sharon Prero as Gutrune & Susan Bullock as Brünnhilde.



Susan Bullock as Brünnhilde, Barry Ryan as Gunther, Daniel Sumegi as Hagen, Sharon Prero as Gutrune & Stefan Vinke as Siegfried.



Stefan Vinke as Siegfried, Jane Ede, Lorina Gore & Dominica Matthews as The Rhinemaidens.



Stefan Vinke as Siegfried, Jane Ede, Lorina Gore & Dominica Matthews as The Rhinemaidens.



Stefan Vinke as Siegfried, Barry Ryan as Gunther & Opera Australia Chorus.



Stefan Vinke as Siegfried & Opera Australia Chorus.

<http://www.limelightmagazine.com.au/Gallery/365421,opera-australias-q246tterd228mmerung-melbourne-ring-cycle.aspx/1>



Stefan Vinke as Siegfried & Susan Bullock as Brunnhilde.



Stefan Vinke as Siegfried & Susan Bullock as Brunnhilde.

Opera Australia brings Wagner's Ring cycle to Melbourne



Jill Stark, Senior writer for The Sunday Age, November 17, 2013



How bizarre, how bizarre: Opera Ring-ins took over a corner of the city on Saturday to let everyone know that Wagner is on the way. Photo: Joe Armao

It was like an acid trip for opera buffs. As the brass band played, eight Xena Princess Warrior lookalikes in metallic bodices arrived on horseback, gossamer wings billowing behind. What followed was a procession so bizarre it bordered on psychotropic. First, a family of wild-haired cannibals, blood-smeared and snarling, leapt at the crowd, wheeling past a cage of severed heads.

Next, a parasol-waving troupe of Mary Poppins-style ladies and their suitors skipped and danced to the beat. Flower children in white linen and bongo drummers in yoga pants mingled with a rabble of gaunt and bandaged street urchins, straight out of a Dickens novel.



Opera Australia's Valkyrie concert parade to celebrate the start of the Melbourne Ring festival. Photo: Joe Armao



<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/opera/opera-australia-brings-wagners-ring-cycle-to-melbourne-20131116-2xnwh.html>

Taking Wagner, and others, by the horns

PETER BURCH, [THE AUSTRALIAN](#), NOVEMBER 27, 2013 12:00AM

THE Austrian septet Mnozil Brass gets its name from the Mnozil Pub, a popular student haunt near the Vienna College of Music where, 20 years ago, the founding members would drink and play music to amuse themselves and their friends.

Today, the ensemble performs at the highest level.

The core of Melbourne's musical homage to Richard Wagner is anchored in the season of his legendary *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

Mnozil Brass's title *Hojotoho* is the famous battle cry of the Ring's Brunnhilde and the Valkyries. The show was commissioned by and premiered in Wagner's adopted home town, Bayreuth, and is touring the world.

It is one of more than a dozen associated local activities that complement Opera Australia's staging of the Ring cycle.

As well as Mnozil Brass's many references to the Ring were snatches of Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, *Lohengrin*, *Meistersinger*, *Rienzi* and *Tannhauser*, plus delirious klezmer music and a solemn performance of Haydn's glorious hymn to Francis II.

Most astonishing was a version of Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody*. What defines Mnozil Brass's performances isn't just the musical content, because the septet doesn't just arrange and perform the music.



What defines Mnozil Brass's performances isn't just the musical content. Source: Supplied

It stages the performances with an energetic accompaniment of light and dark humour, often bordering on Monty Pythonesque lunacy. This clowning and associated choreography reflects, to quote a song from Stephen Sondheim's *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, "something appealing, something appalling".

Philippe Arlaud skilfully directed *Hojotoho*, investing in it a keen sense of spontaneity.

**OPERA
Hojotoho
Mnozil Brass.**

**Presented by Opera Australia and the City of Melbourne,
Arts Centre Melbourne, Hamer Hall, November 24, 2013**

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/taking-wagner-and-others-by-the-horns/storye6frq8n61226769013917>

Life and works of Richard Wagner celebrated in Abu Dhabi

[Lindsay Carroll](#)

December 9, 2013 Updated: December 9, 2013 09:11:00

ABU DHABI // On the 200th anniversary of his birth, two cultural groups hope to highlight the link between Abu Dhabi and the romantic ideals of German composer Richard Wagner.

[Abu Dhabi](#)



Richard Wagner

The Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority has partnered with the Richard Wagner Society Abu Dhabi to host the Richard Wagner Bicentenary Programme on December 10 and 11.

The event will include a discussion of Wagner's work, a concert and a screening of a film version of his opera *Tristan and Isolde*.

Ronald Perlwitz, a literature professor at the University of Bayreuth in Germany, is a Wagner expert and will be speaking at the Abu Dhabi event.

He said he hopes listeners can relate to the composer's personal love saga and appreciate his universal appeal.

Mr Perlwitz said the Middle East greatly influenced Wagner and his contemporaries, who considered the region "the place of magic, the place of dreams, the place of One Thousand and One Nights."

As for the romance, Mr Perlwitz said Wagner's unrequited love for a married woman served as a main inspiration. *Tristan and Isolde* was based on an old European love story dating "far before Romeo and Juliet".

"It's one of those couples like Layla and Majnun – it's the myth of the two lovers who cannot come together, and for this reason, in a way, are madly in love with each other," he said.

Writing the opera was Wagner's way "to live his relation to her", Mr Perlwitz added.

Zaki Nusseibeh, Cultural Adviser to the Ministry of Presidential Affairs, is the Wagner society's president and co-founder.

He said the intensity of Wagner's music and "vast dramas" share similarities with those in the Arab tradition.

Mr Nusseibeh recounted a story about a local college student who attended a previous Wagner concert and later wrote to the organisers, saying she couldn't sleep the whole weekend because the music had stayed with her.

The programme starts with the round table on December 10 at 6pm, featuring Mr Nusseibeh, Mr Perlwitz, musicologist Anno Mungen and literature professor Uwe Steiner. A concert follows at 8pm, featuring pieces performed by soprano Kristin Ebner and pianist Evgeny Nikiforov.

The outdoor screening of *Tristan and Isolde* starts at 7pm on December 11. The events, held at Manarat Al Saadiyat in the Saadiyat Cultural District, are fully booked.

This event is the first in a planned series of concerts in Abu Dhabi called Classical Music Encounters Between East and West.

icarroll@thenational.ae

<http://www.thenational.ae/uae/life-and-works-of-richard-wagner-celebrated-in-abu-dhabi#ixzz2n3SfXbrZ>

Limelight Magazine under threat of closure

By [Clive Paget](#) on Nov 29, 2013 (2 days ago) filed under [Classical Music](#) | [6 Comments](#)

Award winning publication, and Australia's only classical music magazine, faces an uncertain future.

Limelight magazine is currently under threat of closure after its publisher Haymarket Media has chosen to wind up its operations in Australia. *Limelight* is now in search of a buyer to take over the award-winning classical music magazine and website.

The decision came after Haymarket Media announced that they would cease to publish in Australia and were selling or licensing their brands to local publishers. Haymarket Media have been publishing *Limelight* magazine under licence from the ABC since 2006.

"With the Haymarket Media Group internationally focusing on its chosen sectors, and the recent expansion in Singapore, we

saw this as an ideal time for our Australian brands to go to local publishers that will invest to ensure their long-term future," said Jeremy Vaughan, Haymarket Media's Managing Director.

Liz White, GM ABC Publishing said, "Winning Relaunch of the year 2012 and Consumer Magazine of the year 2013 (under 20,000 circ) at the Publishers Australia Excellence Awards was an endorsement from the magazine industry of the *Limelight* team's achievements."

Haymarket Media is still soliciting expressions of interest in *Limelight* until it closes its Australia offices on December 13.

<http://www.limelightmagazine.com.au/Article/366060,limelight-magazine-under-threat-of-closure.aspx>

Nothing is ever plain sailing.... a year ago Richard Mills was the conductor...

Full circle

MATTHEW WESTWOOD, [THE AUSTRALIAN](#), NOVEMBER 03, 2012 12:00AM



Conductor Richard Mills, who will helm the Ring cycle for Opera Australia. Source: Supplied

ONE thing that director Neil Armfield promises audiences won't be seeing in his Ring cycle next year is horned helmets.

Those helmets, along with breastplate armour and big-boned sopranos, are among the many clichés that have encrusted

themselves to Richard Wagner's masterwork, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Next year is the composer's birth bicentenary, and as the world's leading opera houses stage new or remounted Ring cycles, directors will be grappling with its myriad challenges anew. Few works of art have been subject to as much microscopic analysis, and such wacky directorial treatment, as the 16-hour music drama.



Susan Bullock will appear as Brunnhilde for Opera Australia's Ring. Source: Supplied

Perhaps that is why Armfield, who is directing the Ring in Melbourne for Opera Australia, has mostly avoided looking at productions by other directors.

"I find it much healthier to try and work from the [opera], and a sense of our own energy and taste and history, rather than trying to make this production answer other productions of the Ring," he says.

A year out, Armfield is reluctant to reveal too many details about the Melbourne Ring. But in conversation he alludes to the themes that are likely to feature prominently: plunder of the earth for wealth and power, environmental catastrophe, a background of warfare and migrations of displaced people, redemption that can only be achieved with love.

Wagner, in Armfield's view, created a parable of the endgame of capitalism. "Wagner was trying to look at the way the very powerful in society were acting out of self-interest, and not out of interest for the planet or ... society," he says.

The Melbourne Ring is OA's first complete cycle of the four-part opera: an overdue enterprise for the 56-year-old national company (it has previously staged the first two parts, *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walkure*).

Lyndon Terracini, when he was appointed OA artistic director in 2009, made it a priority that the company should present a work so central to the repertoire. It follows the two productions staged by the State Opera of South Australia: Pierre Strosser's from the Theatre du Chatelet in 1998, and Elke Niedhardt's in 2004.

Tickets for the Ring went on sale last June - priced \$1000-\$2000 for the four-opera cycle - and were snapped up almost immediately. There is now a waiting list.

The cast is a mix of Australian and international singers including English soprano Susan Bullock (as Brunnhilde), Gary Lehman (Siegfried), Juha Uusitalo (Wotan), John Wegner (Alberich) and Daniel Sumegi (Hagen). Bullock has been seen in Australia previously, notably in Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* for OA.

Armfield and conductor Richard Mills are each producing their first Ring cycle, although both have previously, on separate occasions, worked on Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (Armfield directing OA's 1990 production, Mills conducting the Australian Youth Orchestra in a concert performance).

"It's a very big thing to take on," Armfield says. "One of the dangers that we confronted very early is a tendency to want to solve the staging problems before you've done anything else. There's a way of approaching it that I think always leads to disaster. 'How are we going to do the river? How are we going to do the toad? How are we going to do the flying valkyries on horses?'"

"You get a production that is only about problem-solving staging effects, and the issue of what the piece is about - what the world of it is, and what the theatre of it is - can be pushed into the back seat."

Nevertheless, Armfield and designer Robert Cousins will have to deal with Wagner's stage directions. The opera begins at the bottom of the Rhine river and ends with the destruction of the world through conflagration and flood. Wagner was a composer who orchestrated shock and awe.

"In every opera there is something unbelievably spectacular," the director says of his production. "We have very much tried to steer away from the staging of it as a kind of empty display of wealth and technical prowess. Everything on stage is a metaphor of the ideas and the energies that underpin the work."

More important to the director are the personal interactions between characters, the power structures at play in Wagner's world of gods, heroes, giants and dwarves. "We wanted to play with very beautiful and theatrical images, but without getting into what you might call scenery," he says. "And the work is extremely intimate in so many ways: there is a cast of basically a dozen principals ..."

"It's a danger to monumentalise everything in the work. Even though it is Wagner dealing with the greatest issues of philosophy and civilisation - in a sense creating a work of art that traces the beginning, middle and end of human civilisation on earth - it nevertheless sits inside this amazing and complex personality of Wotan, trying to find a way to save the world and balance his own ambitions and desire for control with a more profound understanding that, actually, you have to release control. Everything works from that tension."

The Ring is undeniably a work of political theatre, shaped by the currents of the mid-19th century. Armfield points out that at the time Wagner started writing the librettos to the Ring operas, he was a wanted man for his role in the 1848 pro-democracy uprisings.

"Had he stayed in Dresden he would have been tried and executed," Armfield says. "[The Ring] springs from a profound anxiety about what capitalism was doing to the world and to society."

British music critic and Wagner expert Barry Millington, in his new book *Richard Wagner: The Sorcerer of Bayreuth*, outlines the "bracingly varied, even contradictory" range of interpretations given to the Ring.

George Bernard Shaw saw it as an allegory of rampant capitalism; German nationalists saw in the hero Siegfried a saviour of the fatherland; post-World War II directors attempted to depoliticise the music-dramas and see them in terms of symbol and archetype. There have been Jungian, Freudian, environmental and postmodern interpretations, some of them subverting the Wagnerian tradition and cult of the hero.

Armfield contends that a dramatic work cannot be presented without interpretation, as if its meaning will somehow communicate itself. His setting of the Ring is "absolutely in our contemporary world", suggesting such news headlines as the arrival of refugees and the resources boom. However, audiences should not go looking for real-life figures being represented on the State Theatre stage in Melbourne next November: Gina Rinehart, Armfield says, will not be making a guest appearance as Brunnhilde.

"The work begins with the stealing of the gold - the power to make and create material wealth - and it ends with the seas rising and the gods being consumed in fire," he says.

"It sort of suggests a world that is prophetically not too far from projections of our own."

Matthew Westwood is arts correspondent for *The Australian*

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/in-depth/full-circle/story-fna5pnlf-1226503206258>

Neil Armfield promises a Ring of revolution with Opera Australia's production

MATTHEW WESTWOOD, [THE AUSTRALIAN](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/in-depth/full-circle/story-fna5pnlf-1226503206258), OCTOBER 19, 2013 12:00AM



Neil Armfield regards *The Ring*, in part at least, as a work of people's theatre. Picture: Nikki

Short Source: *The Australian*

RICHARD Wagner wrote his great music-drama *Der Ring des Nibelungen* when he was in a rebellious mood. The German composer was caught up in the pro-democracy Dresden uprising of 1849, demanding an end to property, class divisions and aristocratic privilege. A warrant was issued for his arrest as a political outlaw.

Wagner fled into exile in Switzerland, and within a few years had written the text of the Ring, using the Norse Nibelung legend to make a parable about the beginning and end of the world. It depicts nothing less than the overthrow of the corrupt old order.

He had revolutionary ideas about how his music-dramas should be staged, too. He imagined a specially built theatre and free performances in a festival-like setting, after which the theatre would be destroyed and his music burned, so that others could tell their own stories.

His ideal was the democratic theatre of the Greeks, and he wanted his music-dramas to be accessible. On the occasion of the first Melbourne performance of *Lohengrin* in 1877, he wrote a letter expressing his desire that his works be "fully understood by an English-speaking audience".

The reality of Wagner productions is very different, as the whole business of staging the Ring is so often about money, power, prestige and cultural cred, starting with the first performances at Bayreuth in 1876.

Consider the statistics of Opera Australia's first complete Ring cycle, opening in Melbourne next month: the cost (approximately \$20 million), private patronage (\$6m-plus in donations), ticket prices (\$1000 to \$2000, all sold) and duration (four days). The very thought of 16 hours of German opera is enough to put many people off.

It is the summit of the operatic arts and that is why Opera Australia must do it, says artistic director Lyndon Terracini.

"If any opera company has any sort of desire to be an international company, then you just have to do the Ring," he says.

It's also about having a balanced program: just as the company does opera spectaculars on Sydney Harbour, and community opera in indigenous towns, so it must do high-end Wagnerian music-drama.

In other respects, the Melbourne Ring cycle is attempting to reconnect with the younger Wagner's revolutionary ideals, with an environmental twist.

Director Neil Armfield regards the Ring, in part, as a work of people's theatre - "that's how it was written" - and has approached the production with the economical stagecraft that is a hallmark of his theatre work. He is alert to the incongruities of the Wagner tradition: "Wagner was an opera composer who was trying to put a bomb under contemporary arts practice," he says. "That's why, in a moment of levity, he suggested that the opera house should burn down at the end of *Gotterdammerung* ... It's ironic that it costs so much to put on."

Armfield's pared-back aesthetic did not win favour in Houston, where the local opera company pulled out of plans to share the Australian director's production and has opted for a more spectacular, hi-tech Spanish version.

Armfield had also made it plain that he regards the Ring not only as a parable of money and power, but of man's destruction of the natural world. Nature is represented everywhere in the Ring operas, he explains, starting with the Rhine River and the three Rhinemaidens (who are shown on our cover in Alice Babidge's costume designs, like something from an Esther Williams aquamusical).

The action gets under way when the dwarf Alberich renounces love, steals the Rhine gold and has made the magic ring of the title: an act in which Armfield sees parallels, in our time, to rapacious hunger for oil and mineral resources.

He recalls a fundraising dinner in Houston - when the co-production was still on the table - at which a billionaire asked him about his interpretation of the Ring.

"I said I think it's about, among other things, the destruction of the world through the extraction of its natural resources as a means for creating wealth," Armfield says. "Which is definitely what the Ring is about."

He adds: "There was a bit of a shocked silence in the room."

THE Rhinemaidens have been calling Armfield for several years, trying to seduce him with their song.

In 1979, the Australian Opera (as the national company was called) began what was to have been a fully staged Ring cycle, but ended being a series of concert performances with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra of *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre* and *Gotterdammerung*.

The SSO did the Ring operas again in the late 1990s, in concerts at the Sydney Opera House. They were wonderful performances but chief conductor Edo de Waart had ambitions of something grander, imagining a staged production that Armfield would direct.

Later, Wagner enthusiasts Maureen Wheeler and Peter Bassett investigated the idea of mounting the Ring in Melbourne. It had become clear that Elke Neidhardt's splendid Adelaide Ring from 2004, with Lisa Gasteen as Brunnhilde, could not be repeated. There was no federal money for a revival, and the production design - built into the Adelaide Festival Theatre - was too costly to move elsewhere. Eventually, the sets would be sold off as memorabilia and scrap.

Wheeler, founder with husband Tony of the Lonely Planet travel guides, had a tantalising idea: to stage the Ring under the dome of Melbourne's Royal Exhibition Building, that grand monument to colonial wealth and emerging nationhood. Armfield was her preferred director.

She asked engineering firm Arup to look at the logistics. A stage would have to be built, of course, and seating, and possibly temporary awnings over the roof to reduce the

inevitable rain noise. An expensive and probably unviable undertaking, the idea was let go.

In 2008, Armfield was approached by Houston Grand Opera about doing the Ring there. The Texan overture was not unusual: the company's music director (now artistic director), Patrick Summers, has often worked here, and Australian directors Lindy Hume and Armfield have worked there before.

Armfield started thinking about how he would stage Wagner's allegory of wealth and power in the global energy capital. During the several years the production was discussed, Armfield saw it would have to address the oil industry, and environmental catastrophes such as the Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill, 400km southeast of Houston.

In the meantime, Terracini had joined Opera Australia after a decade running festivals in Queensland. A former baritone, Terracini had been itching to do Wagner in Brisbane. He invited Richard Mills to conduct the Australian Youth Orchestra, who gave a beautiful performance of Wagner's great love-opera *Tristan und Isolde* in 2005.

He then invited firebrand conductor Valery Gergiev and the Mariinsky Theatre of St Petersburg to bring their Ring to Brisbane, doing a deal at a "very, very, very reasonable price". To Terracini's frustration, premier Peter Beattie knocked the idea on the head.

Now at the national opera company, Terracini could revisit his ambitions to do the Ring: indeed, it was in his mission statement when he applied for the job, along with the Sydney Harbour extravaganzas.

The stars aligned. Within months of starting at OA, Terracini and former chief executive Adrian Collette had lunch with Wheeler, who was prepared to invest \$5m in a Melbourne Ring. And conversations started with Houston, whereby OA and HGO would share Armfield's production and some of the set-building costs.

When Terracini launched the Melbourne Ring in August, 2010, it was as a co-production with HGO. In Melbourne, Richard Mills would conduct a specially assembled orchestra and a cast of leading Wagnerian singers: British soprano Susan Bullock as Brunnhilde, Finnish bass-baritone Juha Uusitalo (*Wotan*), American tenor Gary Lehman (*Siegfried*) and Australian baritone John Wegner (*Alberich*).

The Melbourne Ring would be presented in one go, with three complete cycles in November this year. Artists and audiences are more likely to commit to the time and travel for a complete cycle, it was reasoned, rather than a Ring on a four-year instalment plan.

Houston had a problem. It would also be HGO's first Ring cycle, and the company wanted to build it up across several years. But Summers, who took over as artistic director in June 2011, had cold feet about Armfield's concept. He wanted something specy, whereas Armfield had taken a "deconstructed view" of the masterwork.

Summers is unwavering in his admiration for Armfield, but says the director's vision in this case would not have sustained his audience for four years. Did oil-rich Texans, taking offence at Armfield's depiction of their industry, pull curtains on the show? Summers says that's nonsense: they were confused at Armfield's more abstract ideas, he says, at a time when the production concept was not fully worked out.

"No patron at any point said, 'Don't produce his Ring cycle,' " Summers says. "That decision was solely mine."

By June last year, Summers had decided that he couldn't take Armfield's Ring to Houston. Instead, he will show the hi-tech - Armfield says "mechanised" - version by Spanish theatre troupe La Fura dels Baus.

Armfield admits to profound disappointment, but does not accuse Summers of rolling over for wealthy patrons. "I think he was going from his own sense of what the work ought to be," he says. "I don't think he was specifically looking over his shoulder."

Houston's withdrawal left a \$1m hole in the budget, Terracini says, and there were other headaches. He had to find a replacement Wotan and Siegfried when singers Uusitalo and Lehman pulled out. Norwegian baritone Terje Stensvold will now come to Melbourne as king of the gods. Siegfried, another crucial role, will be sung by German tenor Stefan Vinke.

Then, at the end of the initial rehearsal period in May, Terracini found himself without a conductor. Richard Mills told him he had decided to quit, citing lack of chemistry and "unity of vision" with the cast.

It seems there were differences between Ring first-timer Mills and the more experienced Wagnerians. An insider described a tense atmosphere in rehearsals, and one "spectacular blow-up" between Mills and Bullock, the principal soprano.

Terracini says he was inundated with offers to help, and settled on a 33-year-old Finn, Pietari Inkinen, whom he had seen conducting in New Zealand. Inkinen had been conducting his first Ring in Palermo earlier this year: a production that was cut short after Die Walkure amid the eurozone crisis.

"These things are all disappointing," Terracini says of the changes to the advertised program. "But they are part of the process and you have to know what you can do about every issue as soon as it arises ... You have to find solutions and I think we have found the right ones."

THEATREGOERS who have admired Armfield's work across several decades will be anticipating how he will tackle Der Ring des Nibelungen, a profound and complex story of relationships, responsibility and destiny.

In plays such as Hamlet and Cloudstreet, and in operas such as Peter Grimes, he depicts characters and the human condition with empathetic intelligence and an absence of cliché.

He certainly does not rely on showiness for its own sake. In his production of The Secret River that played in Sydney, Perth and Canberra earlier this year, he used clouds of white powder - which actors puffed from their palms - to evoke gunshot in the climactic frontier battle.

"All of my work is based on poor theatre principles," he explains, "meaning that you work with an economy of means, and that from the human life on stage, you find the simplest way of telling the story most dramatically."

"It doesn't mean that you're not spectacular, or that it doesn't cost a lot of money, or that it's not visually very rich. It's all of those things, but it comes from a discipline where every moment is questioned and interrogated."

Armfield has previously directed Tristan und Isolde, but no other Wagner: his specialty has been the dramatically tense operas of Leos Janacek and Benjamin Britten. He has not even seen a complete Ring cycle, but caught part of the recent production by Robert Lepage at the Metropolitan in New York.

"I've never seen Siegfried or Gotterdammerung in any production," he says. "So it's very useful for me to come at it as if I know nothing about it, which happens to be the truth."

He has avoided the Wagner stereotypes: there will be no horned helmets on his valkyries. But he says he has stayed true to the spirit of Wagner's precise stage directions, while interpreting their intent. Patrick White's plays require a similar act of translation.

"You find the symbol that sits behind the ideas of [White's] stage directions, knowing that he's writing a kind of poetic-

symbolic text, which is what Wagner very consciously was doing as well," Armfield says.

"We have a responsibility to redefine what that kind of theatrical symbolism is, and find a consistent visual vocabulary in which the singers don't look silly, and which resonates with a contemporary audience."

Armfield and Terracini have been tight-lipped about production details. But Armfield is prepared to discuss some aspects of his concept and design, with sets by Robert Cousins, costumes by Alice Babidge and lights by Damien Cooper. A choreographer, Kate Champion, is associate director.

Armfield has assembled a menagerie of stuffed animals that will represent a kind of Noah's ark and the natural world that Wotan - as king of the gods - tries to protect even as his actions destroy it. Armfield refers to the great natural history museums that were being established in the mid-19th century at the time Wagner was writing his music-drama.

"All through the Ring, as the Norns tell us at the beginning of Gotterdammerung, nature is starting to fail," he says.

"We are exploring a notion of Valhalla where Wotan is trying to gather the world and in a sense protect it - but is also in a sense killing it - by gathering it into this one great ark. As nature dies in the background of the Ring, nature in our own world seems to be moving towards catastrophe."

Armfield's boldest theatrical gesture may be the dozens of extras who will populate certain scenes: a crowd of human onlookers in a world of gods, dwarves, giants and heroes. The volunteer supernumeraries - people of all ages, and from different backgrounds - will form a kind of silent chorus, witnesses to events beyond their control.

"We wanted to create a framework which relates to the real world and the mass of humanity whom the story is about, and whom the events of the story painfully affect," the director says.

"The Ring is set against a kind of ongoing war between Wotan and Alberich, between good and evil, in which the prize is possession of the earth ... It's trying to get a connection between what is happening in our world, and what is happening in the story of the Ring."

OA's first Ring - which the company hopes to restage every three years - will not lack those special effects that committed Wagnerians expect. It will include, for example, the protective ring of fire with which Wotan encircles his daughter Brunnhilde as he puts her to sleep.

But Armfield describes his production in terms of a "people's theatre" that does not depend on flashiness or what he regards as the empty display of technical prowess. In that respect, at least, Armfield's Ring may be closer to Wagner's initial intentions of a popular theatre and a story the world must heed.

"It's not about the display of wealth," Armfield says. "It's about the display of ideas: this glorious music married to poetry, which tells us a story about civilisation moving towards a catastrophe of self-implosion."

Opera Australia presents Der Ring des Nibelungen in three cycles starting on November 18 at the State Theatre, Melbourne. All seats are sold. ABC Classic FM will broadcast the final cycle, starting December 6.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/neil-armfield-promises-a-ring-of-revolution-with-opera-australias-production/story-fn9n8gph-1226741165764>

Ring Cycle pioneer Elke Neidhardt dies at 72

TIM DOUGLAS AND MARK SCHLIEBS, [THE AUSTRALIAN](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/ring-cycle-pioneerneidhardtdiesat72/storve6frq8n61226768247473), NOVEMBER 26, 2013 12:00AM

ELKE Neidhardt, the actress turned opera visionary who went on to become the first director to stage Richard Wagner's Ring Cycle in Australia, died yesterday, aged 72. The German-born actress and director appeared in the television series *Skippy* and 1973 film *Alvin Purple* early in her career, but Neidhardt was most celebrated for directing the 2004 production of Ring Cycle.

The Adelaide production was the first Australian adaptation of the opera, and it was praised by critics around the world. Three years earlier she had directed another Wagner opera, *Parsifal*, to similar fanfare. Fellow director Noel Staunton, who worked alongside Neidhardt and had been a friend for many years, said her passing was a loss for opera in Australia.

"She had an enormous contribution to opera in Australia, and left it with some great productions," Staunton said. "In the opera world, she was a big influence. She will be sadly missed." Neidhardt recently had an operation after the discovery of several tumours but friends last night said they were uncertain of the cause of her death.

A graduate of the Stuttgart Drama and Opera School, she had her first experience directing as an assistant director at Zurich State Opera before appearing in productions around Europe.

The actress first made her name on Australian screens in 1968 as Anna Steiner in *Skippy the Bush Kangaroo*, before being

appointed in 1977 as resident director at Opera Australia, a position she held for 13 years.

After taking on the directorship at Cologne State Opera, Neidhardt became well acquainted with Wagner's Ring Cycle, staging the work there three times. The 16-hour epic is currently being staged by Opera Australia in Melbourne. She returned to Australia and became the first director to stage the four-opera work in this country in the State Opera of South Australia's critically acclaimed production.

Neidhardt, also known as a judge on the ABC's amateur opera reality show *Operatunity*, married Australian actor Christopher Muir in the 1960s.

They had a son, Fabian, but divorced in 1967. Neidhardt went on to have a 35-year relationship with actor Norman Kaye, who died in 2007.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/ring-cycle-pioneerneidhardtdiesat72/storve6frq8n61226768247473>



Acclaimed Australian theatre and opera director Elke Neidhardt dies aged 72

By national arts reporter Anne Maria Nicholson, 26 November 2013

One of Australia's most noted opera and theatre directors, Elke Neidhardt, has died at the age of 72.

Neidhardt was born in Germany, and her early career was as an actor, appearing in theatre, television and films in Europe and in Australia.

But it was her direction of operas that made her reputation, notably in Adelaide in 2004, when she directed the first full modern Australian production of Wagner's *The Ring* to great acclaim. The 16-hour marathon is currently being staged in Melbourne by Opera Australia.

"Elke was a great theatrical and operatic talent. Her Ring Cycle in Adelaide was one of the memorable experiences of my life and for thousands of others too," theatre critic Dianna Simmonds said.

"She was funny, clever, wicked, wonderful to be with and a rigorous and encouraging friend. We will miss her so much."

Opera Australia recognised her talent early, appointing her as resident director in 1977. She held the position for 13 years.

Germany beckoned her home and she joined the Cologne State Opera where for six years she embraced Wagner's work and staged the Ring Cycle three times.

Outspoken with a reputation for clashing with conductors

But, speaking to the Sydney Morning Herald about Wagner's work in 2008, Neidhardt said: "Wagner was tainted - he was an evil man in our household."

"Such an anti-Semite and altogether a nasty person," she said.

"I much prefer his orchestral stuff to the sung side of matters. Mozart is just so incredibly beautiful to listen to, the genius of what he's written."

Neidhardt was outspoken on many issues and had a reputation for clashing with conductors she worked with on operas as she pushed to realise her artistic version.

In 1998, there was a standoff in the Sydney Opera House on the set of *Tannhauser* between her with French conductor Philippe Auguin that nearly halted the production.

She also struggled with what she described as Australian "prudishness" when there was a nudity warning about a shower scene in *Don Giovanni*.

"[Conductors] are all egomaniacs," she told The Sydney Morning Herald.

"Just look at the record covers of any of these big conductors. It's all these poses, they have infinite power. You stand there in front of a band of a hundred people and they've got to do what you say."

Her Australian acting credits included the television series *Skippy*, *The Link Men* and *Shannon's Mob* and the films *Alvin Purple*, *Libido* and *Looking Out*.

Neidhardt lectured at NIDA and the Sydney Conservatorium of Music was a judge on the ABC reality television show *Operatunity* in 2006.

In 2005, she won the Helpmann Award for best direction of an opera for *The Ring Cycle*.

She was awarded an Order of Australia in 2011 "for service to the performing arts as an opera director and producer, and through the tuition and mentoring of young emerging artists".

Neidhardt was married to Australian actor Christopher Muir and divorced in 1967.

She went on to have a 35-year relationship with actor Norman Kaye, who died in 2007.

Neidhardt died yesterday after a long illness. She is survived by her son, Fabian.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-11-26/theatre-director-elke-neidhardt-dies-at-72/5117428>

FROM THE ARCHIVE

Arts previews & reviews

Kelsey Munro, July 5, 2008, *The Sydney Morning Herald*

BEAUTIFUL and thrillingly blunt, opera director Elke Neidhardt's sense of humour softens her Teutonic directness.

In the penultimate week of rehearsals for her new production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, conversation ranges over Australian culture ("still behind in many aspects; I mean quite massively



"If you twist something it's got to remain twisted and not unravel" ... Elke Neidhardt found *Don Giovanni* difficult. Photo: Marco Del Grande Photo: Marco del Grande

All this is delivered in such a way that it's impossible to be anything but delighted by her frankness. And why, later, it is such a shock to see Neidhardt in tears. It happens when I ask about her partner of 35 years, the Australian actor and musician Norman Kaye, who died last year after suffering Alzheimer's.

"Horrible. Just horrible," she says quietly. "I still cry. Yes, it was ghastly."

After a moment's pause she continues, "It's one of the worst diseases anyone can have. It's slow and they just disintegrate in front of your eyes. It's ghastly. I don't talk about it a lot but it was hard. He may be in a better place, I don't know. But I'm glad it's over and I'm sad it's over, if you know what I mean."

Compounding the pain of Kaye's suffering, she says, was the way his friends melted away. "It taught me a lot about mankind. People stayed away in droves. The loneliness when someone's sick, particularly a mental illness or whatever you call dementia. People can't cope. Even his closest friends, they say, 'I'll go tomorrow,' and they never visit, or that he won't remember anyway, which is all crap."

She is still coming to terms with the loss. "It's a year. It will take a bit longer."

Stuttgart-born Neidhardt, who has spent half her life in Australia and finally became a citizen 18 months ago, directed Australia's first and only production of Wagner's complete *Ring* cycle in Adelaide in 2004. She has called Sydney home since 1996 but travels frequently to another home in

behind"); the Opera House ("fabulous building but awful to work in. It's all too small, the pit is laughable: a big botch-up") and German snobbery about Wagner ("they endure the torture of sitting in Bayreuth," she says of the German city's annual Wagner festival, "and it is torture, just so they can say they've been").

Munich where her son, Fabian Muir - whom Kaye helped raise - works as a lawyer and writer.

Muir wrote a moving obituary of Kaye the romantic, recalling how he would pick flowers and present them to Neidhardt with daily marriage proposals. Evidently, she saw no need to make their enduring partnership official.

Today she works freelance but Neidhardt was the Australian Opera's resident director from 1977 to 1990. She was then appointed principal resident director at the Cologne state opera and returned to Germany for six years where she restaged three complete *Ring* cycles. She has directed numerous other operas, including *Tosca*, *La Traviata*, *Tannhauser* and *Salome*.

"It's a nice line of work, yes," she says of her job. "But I woke up at 4 o'clock this morning and haven't slept since, so it does that too."

Her provocative Adelaide *Ring* cycle was a critical and popular triumph.

Its 16 hours of music over four opening nights in a week was the culmination of four years of work and sleepless nights, and remains her proudest professional achievement. Yet she much prefers Mozart's music to Wagner's.

"Wagner was tainted - he was an evil man in our household," she says, "such an anti-Semite and altogether a nasty person. I much prefer his orchestral stuff to the sung side of matters. Mozart is just so incredibly beautiful to listen to, the genius of what he's written."

"Everything - leave out the *Requiem* maybe but even that's so fantastic - is sparkling and fills you with joy, or it did with me and still does."

Despite this, *Giovanni* is proving a challenge. "Of course the *Ring* cycle was no walk in the park," she says, "but the people are so difficult in *Giovanni*. If you want to do something new, you've got to be consistent ... If you twist something it's got to remain twisted and not unravel in the end. *Giovanni's* hard. But there are very few operas I like more."

Neidhardt has famously bad relationships with her conductors; the contrasting priorities and duelling egos of director and conductor often precipitating spectacular clashes. "They're all egomaniacs," she says. "Just look at the record covers of any of these big conductors. It's all these poses, they have infinite power. You stand there in front of a band of a hundred people and they've got to do what you say."

St Petersburg-born conductor Mikhail Agrest is conducting *Don Giovanni*, after Richard Hickox withdrew when European commitments were brought forward. Neidhardt and Agrest are working together "so far, splendidly. It would be pretty well the first. Though I haven't had an argument with Richard Hickox either," she laughs. "Yet I really love working with conductors. I admire them."

Neidhardt again enlisted set designer Michael Scott-Mitchell, with whom she had worked on the *Ring* cycle, for her take on *Giovanni*, a classic story she places in contemporary times. The tall, handsome Hungarian bass Gabor Bretz plays opera's most famous lothario. Often portrayed as a dark figure, in Neidhardt's reading, Don G is a "fabulous lover" who is self-obsessed, unthinking, rebellious and irresistible.

"He won't abide by any rules of society. He does what he likes, period. If he offends someone, doesn't matter. He lives entirely for himself," Neidhardt says. "He'll be forever like a chameleon and has this fascination because of that. Once he has conquered, the fun is over. The conquering is the game and the joy for him."

Has Neidhardt ever been attracted to such men?

"Absolutely, to my detriment," she laughs. "Couldn't have, absolutely wanted to have, got totally besotted, obsessed - oh, yes, I understand these symptoms. There comes a point when you say, 'You're a bastard,' and get over it but it can be quite traumatic ... Particularly when you're younger and insecure."

The press material for *Giovanni* contains a nudity warning. When I point this out, Neidhardt almost rolls her eyes. "He takes a shower, behind frosted glass. Anyone who comes for great glimpses of nudity will be disappointed."

Neidhardt is frustrated by the prudishness she believes still plagues the arts in Australia. Such a warning would never appear before contemporary German operas, which are expected to be provocative - that's one reason, she says, that her friend Barrie Kosky has been so successful there. Still, she blames the timidity of the administration here rather than the sensibilities of Australian audiences more broadly. "If someone should complain about seeing two pubic hairs when he steps out of the shower, they can say 'But we warned you,'" she says. "No one in Europe would complain. This is a bit infantile here. What can you do? It's puritanical."

She has friends and colleagues in Germany who consider her insane for working in such a distant outpost of the opera world; while just as many envy her for working in the famous Opera House. "Their eyes gleam," she laughs. "They all think it's a fabulous building - little do they know. Ha."

During her six-year stint as the principal resident director in Cologne from 1990, Neidhardt constantly encountered opera superstars who wanted to perform here but money and scheduling problems usually got in the way. So did the varying cultural priorities that see opera publicly funded to about 50

per cent here compared with 80 per cent in Germany; and the popular tastes of a people whose most famous building is, after all, the Opera House.

"[Australians] see musicals," she shrugs. "Musicals sell, and Opera Australia is doing more of the lighter fare now. G&S, yawn, yawn. But it sells. *My Fair Lady* sold like hotcakes. It seems to be the temperament of the Australians."

Neidhardt came to her love of opera through class visits as a schoolgirl and she believes that a schools program that opened up seats to students here would help build the younger audiences opera desperately needs. "The blue rinses will die off one day," she says. Without an education in opera, "why would [younger people] go? They wouldn't. I think it's a big concern." Opera can be a hard sell in a country where verbally bashing the chardonnay-drinking elite is a popular sport. "Yes," she says. "For those who don't go, it must be annoying that there's so much funding going into theatre. But take it from me; a country is what its arts is ... Australia really funds the arts very little. Australia could be really leading in the arts and for a while, with that house, awful inside or not, the company was shining."

Plans to revive Neidhardt's *Ring* cycle have foundered, with the South Australian and federal governments refusing to chip in enough money to fund the restaging. Scott-Mitchell's spectacular sets languish in storage. "It must be the only *Ring* cycle in the entire world that had one outing," she says. "It's ridiculous. It would definitely sell out."

Following *Giovanni*, Neidhardt will re-stage a production of *Werther* for Opera Australia. "It's not mine but I've made it mine," she says. "It's based on a Goethe novel, very dramatic, suicide and all that, very operatic material."

After that, she has no plans. "Probably do up the house. Have massages and go to the hairdresser. I hope not. I'd die if I don't work. I enjoy it for a while but in the end I like to get my teeth into something."

Life has been very different since Kaye died. "Yes. It took up a huge amount of my time and thoughts and all that," she says. "Instead of feeling hugely relieved, I actually felt quite empty." She pauses. "I miss him. Sick or not sick." Then she says firmly, gathering herself, "It's a part of life."

Don Giovanni opens at the Sydney Opera House tonight.

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts/showerscenefromgio/2008/07/04/1214951021973.html>



OPERA AUSTRALIA

Elke Neidhardt is a freelance director, whose work has received acclaim both in Australia and overseas. In 2001 she directed the first Australian production of Wagner's *Parsifal* for State Opera of South Australia which prompted an invitation to direct *Der Ring des Nibelungen* for the same Company. Both productions were highly praised by critics writing for publications all over the world. While Wagner is one of her great strengths her repertoire spans all composers and periods and her creative approach to all the work she has undertaken is

one of the talents that singles her out as a Director. In 2006 Elke participated in the ABC Television production of *Operatunity Oz* which was televised nationally and received very good critical reviews. Recent work for Opera Australia includes Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and reviving her own productions of *Werther*, *Il trovatore* and *Tannhäuser*.

German-born, Elke graduated from the Stuttgart Drama and Opera School. Her first directing experience was as Assistant Director at Zurich State Opera, followed by engagements as an

actress at Theater in der Josefstadt in Vienna as well as freelancing in theatre, feature films and television in Germany, Austria and France. In addition she worked as an Assistant Director on Festival productions of operas in Aix-en-Provence, Amsterdam, Salzburg and Vienna.

In 1977 Elke joined The Australian Opera as Resident Director where, until 1990, she directed and re-staged a wide variety of the Company's repertoire.

In 1990 she was appointed Principal Resident Director and Director of Productions at Oper der Stadt Köln in Germany. In this position she initially assisted and then restaged three complete Wagner Ring Cycles.



Elke Neidhardt

Opera credits include:

Opera Australia: *Tannhäuser*, *Werther*, *La Cenerentola*, *Fidelio*, *Lohengrin*, *Salome*, *Andrea Chénier*, *Fidelio*, *Il trovatore* and *Don Giovanni*

Opera Queensland: *Il trovatore*, *Fidelio* and *Andrea Chénier*

West Australian Opera: *Il trovatore*

Victorian State Opera: *The Flying Dutchman*, *I puritani* and *Lohengrin*

State Opera of South Australia: *Salome*, *Parsifal*, *Il trovatore*, *Andrea Chénier* and *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (Ring Cycle)

Oper der Stadt Köln: *La Finta Semplice*, *Tosca*, *Die Fledermaus* and *La traviata*.

Theatre credits include:

Bell Shakespeare Co.: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (National Tour).

Now based in Australia, Elke is in demand as a tutor and lecturer, having worked at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) and the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, among other leading institutions.

http://opera.org.au/aboutus/our_artists/creative_teams/elke_neidhardt

Opera world mourns Elke Neidhardt, director of the 2004 Adelaide Ring Cycle the first Australian adaption of the Wagner opera

LOUISE NUNN, THE ADVERTISER, NOVEMBER 28, 2013 11:57AM

The opera world is mourning the passing of Elke Neidhardt, director of the 2004 Adelaide Ring Cycle.

The German-born actor-turned-director died in Sydney on Monday, aged 72. She was diagnosed with cancer three months ago.

Neidhardt's Ring, for State Opera, was the first Australian adaptation of Richard Wagner's celebrated four-opera cycle, and critically acclaimed around the world.

Opera Australia is currently staging a second Australian Ring production in Melbourne.

State Opera artistic director Tim Sexton said yesterday Neidhardt's Ring "indelibly sits in people's minds as one of the great Ring cycles".

"She was a hard task master, she really drove people around her to get the results she wanted, and in terms of the 2004 Adelaide Ring that vision was well-played out," he said.

Neidhardt directed *Parsifal*, another huge Wagner opera, in Adelaide in 2001.

She appeared on TV in 1968 as Anna Steiner in *Skippy the Bush Kangaroo*, featured in the 1973 film *Alvin Purple*, and was resident director at Opera Australia for 13 years from 1977.

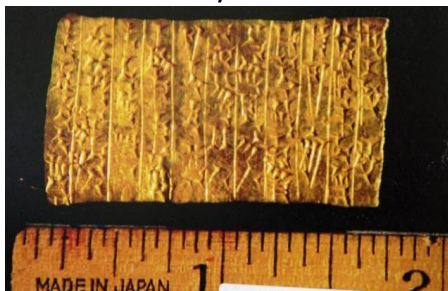
Neidhardt was director at Cologne State Opera, where she staged three Ring Cycles before working on the 16-hour epic in Adelaide.

<http://www.news.com.au/adelaidenow/>

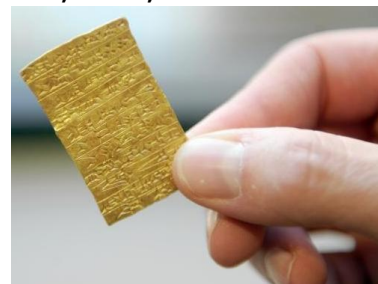
Holocaust survivor's family ordered to ship \$10M gold tablet back to Berlin museum, court rules

Long Island family fought to keep the 3,000-year-old artifact but the state's highest court rejected the 'spoils of war' defense.

BY [GLENN BLAIN](#) / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS ALBANY BUREAU, PUBLISHED: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2013, 1:25 PM. UPDATED: FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2013, 1:32 AM



The 3,000-year-old gold tablet was rejected as a "spoils of war" in ruling by the state Court of Appeals, the top court in New York.



An ancient gold tablet which a judge ruled must be returned to a Berlin museum. THEODORAKIS, ANDREW

ALBANY — A Holocaust survivor's family has to hand over a precious 3,000-year-old gold tablet to the German museum that is its rightful owner, the state's highest court ruled Thursday.



JOHN MACDOUGALL/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Pergamonmuseum on Berlin's Museum Island, where the golden tablet was ordered returned.

The Court of Appeals, in a unanimous decision, rejected a "spoils of war" defense and ended a lengthy legal battle

between Berlin's Vorderasiatisches Museum and the family of the late Riven Flamenbaum.

Flamenbaum, an Auschwitz survivor who lived in Great Neck, L.I., and ran a Manhattan liquor store for decades, brought the Assyrian relic to the U.S. after World War II.

It wound up at the Berlin museum, and officials there say it was then plundered by Russian troops who helped defeat the Nazis in World War II.

It's not clear how it came into Flamenbaum's possession. "Family lore is that he traded a Russian soldier two packs of cigarettes for it," Schlesinger said.

After Flamenbaum's death, the museum — tipped off by one of Flamenbaum's sons, who may have been seeking a reward — sued to reclaim the artifact.

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<http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/family-return-gold-tablet-court-article-1.1516959#ixzz2lQx4kIrg>

Attorney-General asks Abbott not to scrap discrimination law breached by Bolt

[Judith Ireland](#), *Breaking News Reporter*, May 27, 2013

Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus has called on Tony Abbott to back away from a pledge to repeal a section of the Racial Discrimination Act that journalist Andrew Bolt was found guilty of breaching.

Mr Dreyfus wrote an open letter to Mr Abbott on Monday morning, arguing the Coalition's stance on section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act is inconsistent with its support for the London Declaration on Combatting Anti-Semitism.

[The London Declaration](#) aims to draw international attention to the resurgence of anti-Semitism, and has been signed by politicians around the world, including UK Prime Minister David Cameron and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard signed the declaration in April and earlier this month Mr Abbott and every other federal Coalition MP also signed up.

On Monday, a spokesman for Mr Abbott reaffirmed the Coalition would repeal section 18C because "it enables the censorship of free speech".

"The Coalition would seek to limit this section's application to acts of intimidation or harassment. The Coalition strongly supports the London Declaration and the principles underlying it and it is disappointing that Mark Dreyfus has decided to play politics with it," he said.

Mr Dreyfus argues there is now an inconsistency between Mr Abbott's support for the London Declaration, which states that parliamentarians should "legislate effective Hate Crime legislation" and his pledge to repeal section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, if elected.

Section 18C makes it unlawful to publish material which offends or insults a person or group because "of the race, colour or

national or ethnic origin of the person or of some or all of the people in the group".

"Accordingly, section 18C is precisely the kind of legislated protection against anti-Semitism and discrimination that the London Declaration calls on its signatories to enact," Mr Dreyfus' letter states.

Last month Mr Abbott told the Institute of Public Affairs that if elected: "We will repeal Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, at least in its current form."

The Coalition has had reservations about 18C, arguing it hampers free speech, since 2011 when columnist Andrew Bolt was found to have contravened the section for comments he made about a group of indigenous Australians.

Mr Dreyfus, who is the most senior Jewish MP in the Gillard government, said he was "very pleased" to see opposition members sign the London Declaration

"However [it is] apparent that they haven't quite understood what they have agreed," Mr Dreyfus told Fairfax Media on Monday.

Mr Dreyfus said that if 18C was repealed it would carry the implication that "Australia no longer cares about racial hate speech - that as a country we don't believe there should be legal prohibitions against incitement to racial hatred."

The Attorney-General also called on Mr Abbott to be specific about what he would change about 18C.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/attorneygeneral-asks-abbott-not-to-scrap-discrimination-law-breached-by-bolt-20130527-2n6qx.html#ixzz2nEeS5uQ5>

Freedom of speech means freedom to boycott

By **[Chris Berg](#)**, Posted Tue 24 September 2013, 2:23pm AEST

Secondary boycotts in the age of social media can be arbitrary, capricious and poorly thought-through, but that doesn't mean they should be stopped, writes Chris Berg.

There's a saying you hear often in libertarian circles - a government big enough to give you everything you want is a

government big enough to take everything away. Consumer and environmental activists ought to start thinking about this too.

On Monday, the new federal parliamentary secretary for agriculture Richard Colbeck **[told The Australian](#)** that the

government might ban consumer and environmental activists from launching secondary boycotts.

For example, in 2011 GetUp [tried to organise a boycott](#) of companies that were members of the Australian Food and Grocery Council because the council had said Julia Gillard's carbon tax would increase manufacturing costs.

The issue will be considered in the long-promised review of one of the most complex and problematic pieces of Commonwealth legislation - the Competition and Consumer Act 2010.

The Competition and Consumer Act is a 1,500-page behemoth of regulatory complexity. It empowers Australia's most imperial regulatory agency, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.

First introduced as the Trade Practices Act in 1974, the act has been continuously expanded at the behest of consumer activists in and outside government.

Now it seems this labyrinth act is to be turned against those very same consumer activists. And once again the Australian Government is threatening to drown free political debate in a sea of litigation and prosecution.

The Competition and Consumer Act currently exempts consumer and environment activists from its general ban on secondary boycotts. Colbeck wants to remove that exemption. The ACCC would then be able to take bodies like GetUp to court to stop their campaigns.

There's a technicality in here: we're talking about secondary boycotts, not primary boycotts. A primary boycott is targeted directly at a company which has done something offensive. Don't like how a biscuit manufacturer operates, so you and your friends stop buying their biscuits? That's a primary boycott.

By contrast, a secondary boycott targets the biscuit company's suppliers and consumers. The aim is to punish the offending company by punishing those who the company relies upon.

The classic secondary boycott is the sympathy strike - where unions in other companies down tools in solidarity with aggrieved comrades. Sympathy strikes were endemic in the old heavily-regulated Australian labour market. Both major parties now largely agree that sympathy strikes ought not to be considered legally protected industrial relations action.

People get very agitated by secondary boycotts. You can understand why. They're indirect. They're often pretty unfair - secondary boycotts, particularly in the age of social media, can be poorly thought-through, arbitrary, and capricious.

If you've spent more than a few minutes on Twitter, then you've seen the madness of crowds.

But, as uncontrollable and impulsive as consumer campaigns can be, it would be entirely illiberal to try to suppress them by force of law. Consumer boycotts - primary or secondary - are a

completely legitimate way to express political views. Free markets aren't just a tool to bring about efficient exchange. They are a dynamic ecosystem of individual preferences about what we want to buy and from whom.

And sometimes those preferences involve ethical judgments about corporate values.

Companies know this. They know values sell. That's why we're subjected to flashy social responsibility marketing campaigns. That's why fair trade coffee exists. That's why British Petroleum is now "[Beyond Petroleum](#)" and its logo is a pretty green sun. It's only fair that consumers are lawfully allowed to respond in kind. If that means unwelcome pressure on companies, well, such is capitalism. Consumer preferences can be tough to navigate. Messy as it is, political outrage is part of the push and pull of a free and open society.

I suggested above that consumer activists may have bought this partially on themselves. To stop the Competition and Consumer Act from being absurd on its face, its drafters carved out exemptions for 'nice' activists. But doing so leaves the law vulnerable to the charge, [made by the Tasmanian Liberal MP Eric Hutchinson here](#), that there isn't a level playing field between companies and their activist opponents.

Once we have accepted that the regulatory state ought to control and supervise everything we do in the market, it's no great leap for that state to control our political expression.

The Coalition's boycott proposal demonstrates again that the distinction between economic freedom and free speech is not always great. Sometimes the way we spend our money is literally a form of speech. (I've argued this before. Take, for instance, the [ban on David Hicks profiting from his memoir](#), or the O'Farrell government's [crackdown on political donations](#).)

The Abbott Government says it wants to restore freedom of speech in Australia. It has promised to partially repeal Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act. This would be a good thing. But if, at the same time, the new government imposes new restraints on how private civil society organisations can express their views, it will have done nothing to bring the cause of free speech forward.

Chris Berg is a Research Fellow with the Institute of Public Affairs. His most recent book is *In Defence of Freedom of Speech: from Ancient Greece to Andrew Bolt*. View his full profile [here](#).

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-0924/bergfreedom-of-speech-means-freedom-to-boycott/4977410>

Attorney-General George Brandis's first task: repeal 'Bolt laws' in name of free speech

CHRIS MERRITT, [THE AUSTRALIAN](#), NOVEMBER 08, 2013 12:00AM

THE repeal of the "Andrew Bolt" provisions of the Racial Discrimination Act that make it unlawful to offend and insult people because of their race will be the subject of the first legislation Attorney-General George Brandis will introduce to parliament.

The repeal, which will honour an election promise, will change the definition of racial vilification to eliminate at least two of the grounds that were used against the conservative columnist over articles about light-skinned Aboriginal people.

The changes are part of a series of initiatives intended to reverse what Senator Brandis described as the previous Labor government's attacks on traditional freedoms.

Senator Brandis has also declared his support for Queensland's legislative crackdown on biker gangs and revealed the scheme had won near-universal support at the last meeting of the nation's attorneys-general.

In an interview with *The Australian*, he said terms of reference were being drawn up for an inquiry by the Australian Law Reform Commission into statutory infringements of traditional rights and freedoms.

That inquiry is intended to be completed before the next election.

The Australian Human Rights Commission will also be given a broader mandate to protect all human rights instead of confining its activities to selected areas.

At least one "freedom commissioner" will be appointed next year to protect traditional rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of religion that Senator Brandis said had suffered from past neglect.

"The classic liberal democratic rights that in my view are the fundamental human rights have been almost pushed to the edge of the debate," he said.

"It is a very important part of my agenda to re-centre that debate so that when people talk about rights, they talk about the great liberal democratic rights of freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of worship and freedom of the press."

Before the election, Senator Brandis had promised to amend Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act so speech that is found to be offensive and insulting is no longer defined as racial vilification. He said yesterday he would be engaging in consultations about whether the amendment should go further and wind back other potential grounds for liability.

The changes would be in the first bill he presented to parliament, but because of the consultations it might not be introduced until early in the new year. He predicted the

changes to the Racial Discrimination Act meant the government would be accused of condoning racist behaviour. He rejected that and said it was one of the initiatives aimed at supporting freedom of speech. "You cannot have a situation in a liberal democracy in which the expression of an opinion is rendered unlawful because somebody else . . . finds it offensive or insulting," he said.

The decision to examine more extensive changes to Section 18C comes after several commentators, including Brisbane academic James Allan, had argued that the threat to free speech from the Bolt case meant the entire provision should be repealed.

Senator Brandis said that, at last month's meeting of attorneys-general, when Queensland Attorney-General Jarrod Bleijie outlined details of the new bikie gang laws, "it was met with unanimous support". ACT Attorney-General Simon Corbel had already left the meeting. Those who supported the Queensland crackdown included South Australia's Labor Attorney-General John Rau and Tasmania's Labor Attorney-General Brian Wightman, Senator Brandis said. He said the bikie laws had "been welcomed by the Labor governments in Australia as well as the conservative governments".

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/legal-affairs/attorney-general-george-brandis-first-task-repeal-bolt-laws-in-name-of-free-speech/story-e6frg97x-1226755431421>

George Brandis to repeal 'Bolt laws' on racial discrimination

Jessica Wright, Breaking news reporter for The Age, November 8, 2013

Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Attorney-General George Brandis will fulfil an election promise next week and introduce legislation to repeal a section of Racial Discrimination Act that conservative journalist Andrew Bolt was found guilty of breaching.

The repeal of the laws that make it unlawful to offend and insult people because of their race will be the first legislation Senator Brandis will introduce to Parliament, according to *The Australian* newspaper.

It will change the definition of racial vilification in what the government says is a move towards restoring free speech laws to their full power.

News Corp columnist Bolt was found to have breached the law in 2011 when he penned a column about a group of "light-skinned" indigenous Australians.

The column was found to be in breach of Section 18C, which makes it unlawful to publish material that offends or insults a person or group because "of the race, colour or national or ethnic origin of the person or of some or all of the people in the group" – the same section Senator Brandis intends to wind back.

Senator Brandis told *The Australian* that he was certain that the changes to the act would be viewed as the government condoning racist behaviour, but said he believed "you cannot have a situation in a liberal democracy in which the expression of an opinion is rendered unlawful because somebody else ... finds it offensive or insulting".

"The classic liberal democratic rights that in my view are fundamental human rights have been almost pushed to the edge of the debate," he said.

"It is a very important part of my agenda to re-centre that debate so that when people talk about rights, they talk about the great liberal democratic rights of freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of worship and freedom of the press."

Before the federal election, then-attorney-general Mark Dreyfus called on Mr Abbott to back away from a pledge to repeal the laws, and wrote an open letter insisting the Coalition's stance on section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act was inconsistent with its support for the London Declaration on Combatting Anti-Semitism.

The London Declaration aims to draw international attention to the resurgence of anti-Semitism, and has been signed by politicians around the world, including UK Prime Minister David Cameron and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

Former Prime Minister Julia Gillard signed the declaration in April and Mr Abbott and every other federal Coalition MP also signed up.

A spokesman for Mr Abbott said the Coalition would repeal section 18C because "it enables the censorship of free speech".

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/george-brandis-to-repeal-bolt-laws-on-racial-discrimination-20131108-2x50p.html>

Jewish leaders raise fears over George Brandis' race hate law changes

Jonathan SwanNational political reporter, November 15, 2013

Jewish leaders are preparing to fight Abbott government plans to weaken race hate laws, saying they could encourage persecution and racially motivated violence.

The head of the Jewish national peak body, Peter Wertheim, is concerned Attorney-General George Brandis wants to amend

sections of Commonwealth law that protect Jews and other minority groups against hate speech.

"We don't really know what's intended," said Mr Wertheim, the executive director of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry.

"Obviously we're concerned about the tenor of [Senator Brandis'] announcements and we do wish to consult with the Attorney-General.

"The time for talking is before any bill is drafted, not afterwards."

Senator Brandis has signalled that as his first legislative act he wants to amend sections of the Racial Discrimination Act that make it unlawful to offend or insult another person on grounds of race or ethnicity.

Senator Brandis has declared himself a champion of "freedom" and disparaged the laws used against *Herald Sun* columnist Andrew Bolt over an article he wrote in which he accused "white" Australians of identifying as Aborigines to advance their careers.

Asked about concerns raised by members of the Jewish community, Senator Brandis promised he would consult "stakeholders and interested parties, including leaders of the Jewish community such as Mr Wertheim, before introducing the legislation to Parliament."

Mr Wertheim has warned that the "wholesale repeal" of sections of the Racial Discrimination Act would not only prevent vilified groups from defending their reputations legally, but would also encourage more sinister forms of hate speech.

"It would ... open the door to the importation into Australia of the hatreds and violence of overseas conflicts," Mr Wertheim said.

Shadow attorney-general Mark Dreyfus said he had condemned Senator Brandis' plans "from the moment he first opened his mouth".

The laws were aimed at stopping "extreme cases of hate speech," said Mr Dreyfus, whose great-grandparents died in the Holocaust and whose father and grandparents fled Nazi Germany for Australia.

"When Senator Brandis says that repealing these laws is in the interests of freedom of speech, what he really means is freedom to engage in public hate speech," Mr Dreyfus said.

Mr Wertheim said he had been given assurances by Senator Brandis' office and Jewish Liberal MP Josh Frydenberg that the Attorney-General would meet him to discuss changes to the Racial Discrimination Act.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/jewish-leaders-raise-fears-over-george-brandis-race-hate-law-changes-20131114-2xiof.html>

Bolt action offers hope for best of both worlds

Chris Merritt, [The Australian](#), November 22, 2013 12:00AM

THE ground rules for fixing the Andrew Bolt provisions in the Racial Discrimination Act are now clear. With goodwill and rational argument there is every likelihood of achieving sensible reform that achieves two goals that are frequently - and incorrectly - viewed as inconsistent.

It is just plain wrong to argue that it is impossible to change the Bolt provisions without encouraging racial vilification.

With a little creativity it might even be possible to achieve the government's promised reforms while simultaneously imposing far more serious penalties on speech that truly amounts to racial vilification.

The Bolt provisions earned notoriety after they were used to impose a civil penalty on columnist Andrew Bolt over articles about light-skinned Aboriginal people.

That simple fact has coloured this debate and, in many cases, triggered an emotional rather than a rational response.

It is possible to conclude that the Bolt provisions - section 18C of the RDA - are an appalling abuse of legislative power without in any way endorsing the content of Bolt's articles. This debate is about the law, not Bolt.

Attorney-General George Brandis wants a legislative solution that will remove at least two of the four heads of liability in section 18C while ensuring federal law does not leave the door open for racists.

So here's something to think about. All of the current heads of liability twist the meaning of the term racial vilification. That has misled many people of goodwill into supporting this provision on grounds that are spurious. They have been conned.

Racial vilification is the broad equivalent of speech that incites racial hatred. Yet the four heads of liability in section 18C penalise speech that falls well short of that mark.

Speech that incites racial hatred is very different to speech that merely offends or insults. It is also quite a stretch to argue that speech that humiliates or even intimidates is the equivalent of speech that incites racial hatred.

There is a case for a federal law that is tightly targeted on speech that incites true racial hatred - but you won't find it in

section 18C of the RDA. Instead of limiting itself to imposing serious penalties for speech that encourages racial hatred, section 18C is the legislative equivalent of what mothers tell their children: "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all."

It is true that at the top end of the scale section 18C would catch the worst kind of racial vilification. But even if it does, is it really appropriate to impose mere civil penalties?

That is the result of the crude policy behind section 18C. It means the legal treatment of speech that encourages real racial hatred is lumped in with the legal treatment of speech that merely causes offence.

For minorities with long memories of persecution, that must be truly offensive. It leaves the way open for the worst kind of racists to align themselves with those who criticise section 18C for making it unlawful to cause offence. As long as serious opponents of racial hatred focus their efforts on preserving section 18C they are doing themselves a disservice. Brandis has made it clear that the first two heads of liability will go - speech that offends and insults. That part of the debate is over. If the RDA is to continue to impose civil liability for the remaining two heads of liability - speech that humiliates and intimidates - it should do so without the current pretext. Those wrongs do not amount to racial vilification and the law should not mislead people into believing they do. But real racial vilification does need a remedy. After a bumpy start to the debate, it is now clear that the Commonwealth Criminal Code has no such provision.

Those who are serious about reform should be urging Brandis to insert one.

If a category of speech is to be outlawed, it should be done nationally.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/legal-affairs/bolt-action-offers-hope-for-best-of-both-worlds/story-e6frq97x-1226765556284#>

Brandis has uphill battle as the fight over section 18 begins

From page 31

racial vilification. After the election, Senator Brandis said he would consult on whether his proposed changes should go even further, and extend to the complete repeal of section 18C, which also makes it unlawful to humiliate or intimidate another person on the basis of race.

He told The Australian on November 7: "There are existing provisions in the Commonwealth Criminal Code about incitement to racial hatred which would stay."

However, Australian Human Rights Commission president Gillian Triggs this week told Senate estimates that incitement of racial hatred was not otherwise unlawful under federal law. Asked if there were any provisions of the criminal code that mirrored section 18C of the RDA, Professor Triggs said: "My understanding is that there are not, although that there are provisions in state laws, most particularly in NSW."

She said the state criminal provisions had never or rarely been used, and this was one of the reasons civil complaints were introduced under section 18C of the RDA.

Senator Brandis told Senate estimates it was difficult to compare the RDA and the criminal code. However, he said the relevant code provision to consider was section 80.2A.

That section outlaws incitement to racial violence.

Because Senator Brandis has said the proposed changes will not condone racist behaviour, consultations are now expected to focus on bolstering the criminal code.

Executive Council of Australian Jewry executive director Peter Wertheim said inciting racial violence was very different to inciting racial hatred.

He said the code's section 80.2A was directed at intentionally urging another person to use force or violence against a group,

where there was an intention that force or violence would occur.

"It's a totally different category of wrong that's being dealt with," he said. "The word hatred or hate or any derivation of the word hate does not appear anywhere in the criminal code."

"To say, therefore, that it's already dealt with in the criminal code is simply false."

Mr Wertheim said he did not believe there was a compelling reason to amend section 18C. He said racial vilification was not an issue only for minority groups.

"This is an issue that goes to the heart of Australia's identity as both a robust democracy and a successful multicultural society."

Senator Brandis told Senate estimates this week he would consult with community groups on the proposed changes.

Mr Wertheim said he had been told the ECAJ would be consulted, and he welcomed the opportunity to provide input.

Human Rights Law Centre executive director Hugh de Kretser said, even if the criminal code did outlaw incitement to racial hatred, there would still be an argument to retain the ability to make a civil complaint under section 18C because the criminal provisions were difficult to enforce.

Nevertheless, Mr de Kretser said, he believed there was a case for raising the threshold of section 18C so it was clear it related only to serious offence.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/legal-affairs/race-to-dilute-nations-hate-speech-laws-reflects-ignorance-of-history/story-e6frq97x-1226765533654>

Race to dilute nation's hate speech laws reflects ignorance of history

MARK DREYFUS, [THE AUSTRALIAN](#), NOVEMBER 22, 2013 12:00AM

FOR almost 20 years, since the Racial Discrimination Act was enacted by the Keating government in 1994, section 18C has embodied Australia's condemnation of racial vilification, and protected our society from the poisonous effects of hate speech.

Labor strongly believes in the continued need for laws that prohibit racial hatred in Australia.

The new Attorney-General and his Prime Minister have made clear their intention to repeal section 18C in its current form, which makes it illegal to vilify people because of their race, colour or national or ethnic origin.

The Attorney-General claims that the prohibitions in section 18C are a threat to "intellectual freedom" and "freedom of speech" in Australia.

One can only assume that he has an extremely poor grasp of history, of the appropriate limits imposed on free speech in all Western democracies, and of the dangers of giving a green light to hate speech under the preposterous claim that racially vilifying individuals in public is necessary to support intellectual freedom in our nation.

Section 18C has functioned well for 18 years in our community, without being criticised as some kind of affront to freedom of speech.

Rather, the provision has been used to respond to egregious examples of hate speech, such as the publication of false statements by infamous Holocaust denier Fredrick Toben, who wrote, among other offensive lies, that there was serious

doubt the Holocaust occurred and that Jewish people who were offended by the denial of the state-sponsored murder of their families and communities were of limited intelligence.

Using section 18C, the Federal Court ordered these deeply offensive public statements be removed from the relevant website.

The Coalition's policy would allow Toben to publish material of this kind, and would take away the power of our courts to stop such racist hate speech being disseminated.

In another infamous case, an indigenous woman used section 18C to defend herself against a neighbour who had waged a campaign of intimidation against her family by attacking them with offensive racist insults such as "nigger" and "black bastard".

It is disingenuous to attack section 18C as a threat to freedom of speech by presenting it in isolation from the linked provision, section 18D.

Following extensive public consultations at the time the provisions were crafted, the drafters were well aware of the need to appropriately protect freedom of speech.

That is why section 18D provides extensive protection for free speech and political communication in our society.

Section 18C is also entirely consistent with the objectives of the London Declaration on Combatting Anti-Semitism, which was signed on behalf of Australia by former prime minister Julia Gillard in April, and was subsequently signed by Coalition MPs including Tony Abbott and George Brandis.

In May this year, I wrote to Mr Abbott calling on the Coalition to respect the pledges in the London Declaration, and to reverse the Liberals' plan to repeal section 18C.

I pointed out that section 18C is precisely the kind of legislated protection against anti-Semitism and racial discrimination that the London Declaration calls on its signatories to enact, and that repealing it would unequivocally contradict the spirit and the terms of that important declaration.

In an interview two weeks ago, the Attorney-General made clear that he intends to persist with the repeal of section 18C regardless of deep community concerns.

However, in senate estimates this week, he at least withdrew from arguments earlier suggesting that the protections provided by section 18C were somehow covered by the Criminal Code Act.

Sections 80.2A and B of the Criminal Code Act create serious criminal offences for individuals that urge the use of force or violence against a group or a member of a group distinguished by race, religion, nationality, national or ethnic origin or political opinion.

These provisions prohibit criminal incitement to violence and do not operate to prohibit the civil wrong of racist hate speech as section 18C does.

In response to questions at senate estimates, Senator Brandis revealed that his "engaging in community consultations" would be limited to "private conversations" with "community leaders" to be selected by him.

He then refused to elaborate on which community leaders he was speaking to or the nature of those discussions.

There is an unpleasant irony in the spectacle of an Attorney-General who claims to champion free speech refusing to answer questions regarding secret consultations he is

conducting in a bid to remove legislative protections of great importance to communities across our nation.

It is essential that the communities affected by any potential change in this area of the law have the opportunity to put their views to Senator Brandis, not just the private group of unidentified individuals that he deigns to have a conversation with.

Public discussions regarding proposed legislative changes on matters of concern to the community such as this are essential for any government that claims to value freedom of speech.

This is a further example of how, in the short time since the election, this government is prepared to shamelessly hide their actions from the scrutiny of both the people who elected them and from the media.

Mr Abbott and Senator Brandis have refused to back down on their proposed watering down of hate speech laws in our nation, reflecting their ignorance of history and the dangers of permitting racially motivated hate speech.

In contrast, Labor is committed to supporting the rights of all Australians to dignity and protection from racially motivated hate speech ahead of enabling bigots and extremists to say in public whatever they want.

Mark Dreyfus is the federal opposition spokesman on legal affairs.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/legal-affairs/race-to-dilute-nations-hate-speech-laws-reflects-ignorance-of-history/storye6frq97x1226765533654#sthash.bgnIqOSk.dpuf>

Professor Gillian Triggs, the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission discusses freedom of speech.

Reporter: Steve Cannane, Australian Broadcasting Corporation TV LATELINE, 27 November 2013

STEVE CANNANE, PRESENTER: In the first few months since the election, the Abbott Government has flagged a number of areas where it wants to make significant changes.

Axing the carbon tax and in recent days abandoning the Gonski reforms have been high priorities for the new government.

The Attorney-General George Brandis has made it clear his first legislative act will be to change Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, which is designed to protect ethnic groups against hate speech.

Section 18C of the act has become known in some circles as the Andrew Bolt law, for the Herald Sun columnist who was successfully prosecuted after writing that certain Indigenous Australians had sought professional advantage from the colour of their skin.

Already, Indigenous, Jewish, Arab and other groups have flagged their opposition to the mooted changes.

At the centre of the debate is Gillian Triggs, president of the Human Rights Commission, which oversees the act.

Gillian Triggs joins me in the studio now.

Welcome to Lateline.

GILLIAN TRIGGS, PRESIDENT, HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION: Thank you.

STEVE CANNANE: Now in the speech that you gave to the Sydney Institute last night, you mentioned the Andrew Bolt case, which seems to be to a large extent what is a driving

force behind these proposed changes. You described the Bolt case as misunderstood. Why is that?

GILLIAN TRIGGS: Well, I think there's been a public concern expressed by the now Prime Minister and Attorney that Section 18C that makes it unlawful to speak in a way which insults, offends, humiliates and intimidates is - was placed at too low a level and that Mr Bolt ought not to have been prosecuted for what is a civil offence. The misunderstanding, I think, is that what the court decided on the legislation was that he had indeed offended the Aboriginal group in the way in which he'd spoken about them, but critically, there is a freedom of speech defence to that offence and Mr Bolt failed to meet those standards because his work in the report was deemed by the judge to be inaccurate and not in good faith.

STEVE CANNANE: So under the act, under 18D of the act, there's a fair comment provision that defends the right to free speech, so he lost that right, is that right, because he was sloppy and made mistakes in his journalism?

GILLIAN TRIGGS: Yeah. So, in other words, we have a right to freedom of speech, but there are occasions when that exercise of the freedom is abused, and in this instance I think one could say it was abused.

STEVE CANNANE: In the Bolt case, the judge said, "Even if I had been satisfied that Section 18C conduct was capable of being fair comment, I would not have been satisfied that it was said or done by Mr Bolt reasonably and in good faith." Does

that mean Section 18D would not have protected Andrew Bolt even if he got his facts right? Does that mean the right to fair comment would have been overruled by a judge's interpretation of what was said or done reasonably and in good faith?

GILLIAN TRIGGS: Well had what he had written been done in good faith and reasonably, he could have made a mistake on the facts.

STEVE CANNANE: But that's up to the judge then to interpret that, isn't it?

GILLIAN TRIGGS: That's right.

STEVE CANNANE: And does that then restrict the freedom of speech of someone like Andrew Bolt?

GILLIAN TRIGGS: Well, it is ultimately an interpretation by the judge, but the critical fact here is that the matter was not appealed. So if you felt that the judge had really got it wrong on the facts, then you would quickly go to appeal and argue that it was unreasonable on the facts, and that didn't happen here. But ultimately, as you suggest, it is a matter of judgment by the court based on the facts that they have in front of them.

STEVE CANNANE: Under the section of the act that George Brandis wants changed, it makes it, "... unlawful when it comes to ethnicity or race or colour to write or say something in public that is reasonably likely in all the circumstances to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another person or group of people." Is the bar set too low there? Some people are easily offended or easily insulted.

GILLIAN TRIGGS: Yes, well, I think that is the nub of the problem. There are many who say in Australia there's a cut and thrust of debate. We can't be so precious that we're offended by everything that's said to us. The point about this legislation is it's not about whether your dress isn't looking that good or you're off your play that day, it's about race and it's in public. Now, it seems that the Government is grappling with the recognised need - and I think the Attorney does recognise this - that people do need to be protected from racial vilification in public. But the question is: are the words insulting and offending too low a threshold and do we need ...

STEVE CANNANE: Because they're very different to humiliation or intimidation, aren't they?

GILLIAN TRIGGS: Exactly. And I think that that is why there's been so much public buy in to, if you like, the Bolt case, even though it's not properly understood. There's still a concern out there that the words "insult" and "offend", which were part of the prosecution for Mr Bolt, were really too low a threshold and that's the key political concern that I think the public has.

STEVE CANNANE: We haven't seen the draft legislation yet, ...

GILLIAN TRIGGS: No, we haven't.

STEVE CANNANE: ... but is that the area that's likely to be the sensitive point - those words: insulting and the other one of course, offending?

GILLIAN TRIGGS: To offend, yes.

STEVE CANNANE: That's right.

GILLIAN TRIGGS: I think so. I mean, it's not been entirely clear what either the Prime Minister or the Attorney have been looking to do, but I think they're trying to find a middle ground. They do recognise the need to protect people against vilification, but at the same time they're concerned that those words are too low a threshold. So I think they will probably look at various options, and they are exploring that in their consultations, but I think they'll probably find something reasonably sensible that maybe takes the low threshold words out and puts in tougher words like vilifying and hatred or

maybe even a word serious that suggests very clearly there's got to be at the higher end of the scale.

STEVE CANNANE: So the groups that are raising concerns at the moment, are they likely to be OK with that, of changing the threshold?

GILLIAN TRIGGS: Well that is a difficulty because I think there are some groups in the community, and perhaps I can particularly mention the Jewish groups, who have used 18C successfully on some occasions, **particularly in what are known as a Toben case**, the holocaust denial case, and they would say the words insulting and offending are important because they are insulted and offended and they do add something. I think probably the legislation will get to protect their interests through the words like racial vilification or hatred, which places it at a higher level and at which case it will be possible to do away with those other words.

STEVE CANNANE: Well Peter Wertheim, the head of the national Jewish peak body, has said, "If you repeal or water down this law, it sends a signal from the Federal Government that racism is permissible - to some extent, that is," he says, "and to the end of the day, the lesson of history is that it doesn't stop with words, it develops into conflicts between different groups." Do you share those concerns?

GILLIAN TRIGGS: Well I do share the concern that to take the words away, the two words, leaving the other two in place and putting in words like hatred or vilification might send a message that, "Well, it's alright to abuse people," and we see this all the time in public transport, in shops, in working canteens, and we know from the commissioner's point of view that we've had a very significant rise in race vilification complaints, particularly, I might say, on the internet and social media. There is a concern that it sends the wrong message. But I think equally, the Prime Minister and the Attorney made this point very clear before the election; they've been good to their promise, if you like, after the election and it's fair that they should be engaged in consultations to see how they can find the right language.

STEVE CANNANE: You mentioned rising complaints there. Is there any comparison between complaints about racial vilification and complaints about freedom of expression being restricted?

GILLIAN TRIGGS: The - our - we receive, I should say, about 17,000 inquiries and complaints a year. In a year we might get one or two or three that are concerned about freedom of speech. However, we get 200, 300 a year in relation to racial abuse of one kind or another. So, I think you can see why from the point of view of the Human Rights Commission, we are very concerned about what appears to be a rising level of abuse of people in public on the grounds of their race or national origin.

STEVE CANNANE: Could it be though that there are people who are concerned out there about freedom of expression, but they're not complaining to the Human Rights Commission 'cause the Human Rights Commission is considered an organisation that oversees anti-discrimination laws rather than laws - well there is no - laws relating to freedom of speech?

GILLIAN TRIGGS: Well that's a fair point and it's fair because we have a lot of legislation on discrimination and equality laws, but we have very little that allows us to protect the right to freedom of speech. Freedom of speech is protected by the courts and by the common law and it's protected by certain pieces of legislation, most particularly, of course, the defence to an 18C unlawfulness. But we really do need to see whether or not, if we would have legislation, for example, whether we'd get a rise in complaints.

STEVE CANNANE: Well given that Tony Abbott and George Brandis have both made it clear that they believe freedom of speech, freedom of expression are big issues and the Human Rights Commission should be dealing with these issues, do you think that they might look at bringing legislation like a human rights act or referred to as a bill of rights in other countries that would enshrine values of freedom of expression into our law?

GILLIAN TRIGGS: Well, at the Human Rights Commission we've been asking for this for a very long time. We believe that we do need some legislative provisions that state these core freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom to - not to be detained arbitrarily, for example. These are core freedoms dating back to the Magna Carta in 1215. We would like to see that legislation. But I think in fairness we have to say we've had the debate in Australia. There isn't really at the moment political support for it and I think it would be unrealistic for me to imagine that this will happen in the short term.

STEVE CANNANE: The Attorney-General has also flagged plans to appoint a freedom commissioner to the Human Rights Commission. What do you understand that to mean?

GILLIAN TRIGGS: Well I think what it really means is that the Attorney is signalling to the Australian public that we want more of the language of freedom and an understanding of freedom and I think I can understand his perception. Because our legislation is devoted mainly to discrimination law - not exclusively; we have some human rights provisions in our basic legislation. But mainly it's in the discrimination area. So I think he's trying to send a message that we've had, in his view, an imbalance - and in the view of the party - an imbalance towards discrimination law and not enough emphasis on fundamental freedoms. Now we say, of course, we're delighted to have a freedom commissioner; freedom's what we do, but it would be even better if we had some legislative tools that that freedom commissioner could then use. But certainly, he or she can talk about the common law freedoms that our courts have always supported.

STEVE CANNANE: But previously tonight you've told us that you don't really get many complaints when it comes to freedom. Does that mean we don't need a freedom commissioner?

GILLIAN TRIGGS: Well that would be one conclusion, but as you yourself have suggested, one reason we don't get those complaints is that we don't have a legislative base for it and because perhaps language has been so much in terms of rights and anti-discrimination law that we haven't been talking about fundamental freedoms and maybe that is going to be the advantage of having somebody prepared to be out there speaking to the public about what freedoms are.

STEVE CANNANE: Given though that you've said there has been so many complaints about racial discrimination and sex discrimination, are you concerned a freedom commissioner could take resources away from the other areas that you're currently dealing with?

GILLIAN TRIGGS: Well that's a financial question. Of course that would be very damaging were we to lose the ability to continue our work in the discrimination area - of course it's disability, it's sex, it's race, it's age and children and other human rights. We would not want to see those resources cut back. But at the same time, we have to acknowledge that we do have budgetary issues as a country and we can't unreasonably expect additional funding. So, we're going to have to find a way of managing our budget and meet our statutory obligations, but we certainly welcome the idea of a freedom commissioner if that creates a better balance for the public to see that freedoms are part of the Australian democracy as well as anti-discrimination laws.

STEVE CANNANE: Professor Gillian Triggs, we'll have to leave it there. Thanks very much for coming in.

GILLIAN TRIGGS: Thank you very much.

<http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2013/s3900500.htm>

There's a cause for amendment but not repeal

HUGH DE KRETZER, [HERALD SUN](#), NOVEMBER 28, 2013 9:00PM

Attorney-General George Brandis has pledged to change Australia's racial vilification laws. Source: News Limited
COMMONWEALTH Attorney-General George Brandis's reform of Australia's racial vilification laws needs to tread carefully.

It's one thing to adjust the laws to better align them with free speech but reports that suggest the laws will be repealed are concerning.

Banning racial vilification is an important tool in tackling racial discrimination and violence and should be retained.

These are the laws that Andrew Bolt breached when he wrote two articles falsely suggesting that a group of successful light-skinned Aboriginals pretended to be Aboriginal to access certain benefits.

That case triggered the current debate that has led to Brandis's promised reforms.

At its core, this debate is about the conflict between two key human rights; freedom of speech and freedom from discrimination.

Freedom of speech is the cornerstone of our democracy. But like most human rights, it is not absolute.

Our laws limit our speech and expression in many areas like defamation, false advertising, censorship and threats to kill.

The challenge is where to draw the line between protecting free speech and protecting against the serious harm that can come from some speech.

It's clear that racial vilification causes serious harm to individuals and society, increasing the likelihood of discrimination and racist violence.

It's also clear that while Australia is generally a multicultural success story, racism is still common.

Beyond the particular incidents of racist abuse on public transport that have captured public attention, research by the Scanlon Foundation, VicHealth and others have documented widespread racial discrimination.

Federal racial vilification legislation currently makes it unlawful to say something that is reasonably likely to "offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate" another person or group because of their race.

Brandis has pledged to change that, saying "you cannot have a situation in a liberal democracy in which the expression of an opinion is rendered unlawful because somebody else ... finds it offensive or insulting".

There is, of course, no general right not to be offended or insulted. The price of free speech is that generally people should be able to say offensive things.

But we do, as a society, accept that there should be a limit and some offensive things should be banned.

Just like our criminal laws ban offensive language and our workplace laws ban offensive speech that sexually harasses someone, our discrimination laws should ban seriously offensive racial vilification.

That is in line with Australia's legal obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to prohibit "any advocacy of racial hatred that incites discrimination, hostility or violence".

It would be a strange situation if you could be charged and fined for swearing in the street, but publishing comments that encourage racial hatred or violence was lawful.

Courts have considered the vilification laws in many cases since they were passed almost 20 years ago. They have made it clear that to be unlawful, the relevant language must be "profound and serious" and go beyond "mere personal hurt, harm or fear".

Examples of breaches of the laws include a comment in a meeting by a Perth councillor that a local Aboriginal group should be shot and a website denying that key aspects of the Holocaust ever happened.

Sydney broadcaster Alan Jones breached the equivalent state vilification laws for reading comments on air that called Lebanese males "vermin" who "infest our shores" saying "let's take the gloves off and make life a collective hell for these bastards".

These are blatantly racist public comments that can spread racial hate and worse still, racially motivated violence. It's right for our laws to try to stop them.

Behind each of the cases that make it to court are many hundreds more complaints that are successfully resolved each year through mediation by the Australian Human Rights Commission. Worryingly, those complaints increased 59 per cent last year.

The laws have important safeguards built into them. Because they aim to stop incitement of racial hatred, they apply only to things said or done in public. If you say something deeply racially offensive in private, the laws won't intervene.

There is also a broad free speech safeguard for anything done reasonably and in good faith in a range of areas including artistic, scientific and academic works and commenting on public interest matters.

Cases that have been protected under those safeguards include a cartoon, a comedy routine and a book by Pauline Hanson in which she said that Aboriginal people were being unfairly favoured by government.

We should have a debate about these laws and we should look at amending them so they only capture serious cases of racial hate speech.

But repealing the laws entirely would be a mistake.

Hugh de Kretser is executive director of the Human Rights Law Centre

Twitter: @hughdekretser

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/theres-a-cause-for-amendment-but-not-repeal/story-fni0ffsx-1226770765441>

ABC RN Late Night Live

Monday-Thursday 10pm Repeated: 4pm the following day

Presented by [Phillip Adams](#)

Free speech and the Racial Discrimination Act

Monday 2 December 2013 10:05PM

In September 2011, Herald Sun journalist, Andrew Bolt was found to have contravened Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act after a group of Aborigines claimed two of Bolt's articles were derisive and riddled with fabrications. Andrew Bolt and many in the media, in politics and in law claimed the verdict was an attack on free speech. George Brandis, now Federal Attorney-General has promised to bring forward legislation to amend or repeal Section 18C of the Act, saying rather than condoning racist behaviour the change is aimed at maintaining freedom of speech.

Guests:

Michael Gawenda: Journalist; former editor-in-chief of The Age newspaper; Inaugural Director now Fellow of the Centre for Advancing Journalism at the University of Melbourne.

John Alizzi: Legal research and consultant with De Marchi and Associates; an editor at Right Now human rights organisation

Credits

Producer: Kris Short

A comment:

Janet Georgouras :

03 Dec 2013 6:16:29pm

Philip mentioned in this interview that he did not want to mention a particular Holocaust denier's name because he did not wish to give him oxygen. There is the reason for the s18A. We do not want to give people with such despicable views air. We should suffocate their worldview. It is why we fought WW2. Hitler's government had no s18A and such ability to air their views did not serve to teach the people of Germany to rein in their bigotry. The racial Vilification Act was not intended for people of privilege like Phillip Adams. It was intended to give power to the vilified and the powerless. That is why it must be kept.

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/latenightlive/free-speech-and-the-racial-discrimination-act/5129564>

'Bolt law' vow must be kept

JAMES ALLAN, [THE AUSTRALIAN](#), DECEMBER 05, 2013 12:00AM

THIS government's commitment to repeal at least parts of section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, the so-

called anti-hate speech laws that were used against Andrew Bolt, raises at least four crucial issues.

First, any commitment to free speech is a commitment to allowing people to say and write things you may not like, that you may detest, that you may disagree with and find offensive. If the words spoken are words we all agree with and find congenial, then there is no need for any commitment to free speech.

John Stuart Mill gave the best reason you'd want society to allow speech that might offend or insult or really annoy others, 150 years ago. His is an optimistic claim that, in the long run, we can trust our fellow citizens to see the truth when they hear myriad opinions and claims.

Mill's defence of free speech also relied on a certain distrust of government and government agents and bureaucracies, and even judges. What grounds are there, really, for thinking they know what is right and true and won't abuse their position when silencing people?

Mill even argued, correctly I think, that we all learn almost as much from hearing what are ultimately wrong and distasteful views, and having to consider and respond to them. We gain a stronger appreciation of what is defensible and plausible.

The next point about the repeal of these existing hate speech provisions is that they were grossly misused in the Bolt case. Like him or hate him, he had a valid point to raise. If you are going to give benefits, affirmative action-type benefits, to people solely or largely because of their race or heritage, then why shouldn't one be able to point out that those getting such benefits don't share characteristics normally associated with that group getting the special deal?

Why shouldn't someone be able to raise those sort of points, even in a sarcastic way? Is it really the case that we want to live in a society where hurt feelings or a sarcastic tone, or even a few wrong factual claims, mean points such as these can't be raised; that they can be silenced by a judge?

The whole Bolt saga was an embarrassment to Australia's liberal credentials.

Next, there is the democratic issue. Tony Abbott and the Coalition went to the September election with a major pledge to repeal all or most of section 18 of the act. So it is right that, having won a big majority, they do what they promised.

If the opposition wishes to block any such repeal in the Senate, then it is purely a pragmatic question of how to proceed, most likely by waiting for the new Senate. But if it were to be blocked there, too, then I would hope, indeed expect, a double-dissolution election on this. It is a matter of that sort of importance, truth be told.

The fourth issue relates to the prudential aspects of running a newly elected government. George Brandis, our new Attorney-General, made plain his commitment to free-speech principles before the election. And he is clear that he will proceed with some sort of repeal.

Yet now we are hearing from groups such as the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council and the Executive Council of Australian Jewry that they are somewhere between lukewarm and downright frosty on this idea of repeal.

I need to make clear that I think I am one of the biggest non-Jewish supporters of Israel going. I see a democracy

surrounded by a sea of authoritarian regimes that attack it regularly. But none of that makes any claims from groups such as these about strong hate-speech laws being necessary to protect Jews in Australia even remotely plausible.

The biggest and most successful population of Jews outside Israel lives in the US. You know what? There are no hate-speech laws in the US. None. All of the supposed dire consequences that will befall Jewry in Australia have not done so in the US.

In fact, if you look at European democracies with strong hate-speech laws of the sort the executive director of the ECAJ seems to prefer, many of those are far less congenial places for Jews to live than the US. And that's putting it mildly.

Jews in the US are able to trust the ultimate good sense of the public there to see through the ranting idiocies of neo-Nazi nutcases but, apparently, we in Australia can't get rid of section 18C because the public here is not to be trusted.

Seriously? I think that gets things all wrong. It's most obviously wrong on the consequences. As Mill said, it's bad to silence people holding dumb and nasty views because that way people don't get to see that those views are dumb. Worse, you turn them into martyrs.

You end up legislating in favour of smart, articulate (but equally nasty) people who take those nasty ideas and repackage them in ways that get around the laws. You get, for example, the unintended consequences of taking the idiocies of Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front in France and forcing it to be repackaged in the hands of a more careful, ever-so-slightly more circumspect daughter - one who ends up being more successful. It's not clear to me what hate-speech laws have done in France to further the position of Jews or other minorities.

So I think the ECAJ of Australia is terribly wrong-headed in its opposition to the repeal of these laws. And that takes me to my second point to make clear.

I have no idea if the AIJAC or the ECAJ are big supporters of the Coalition parties. Nor do I know whether they would try to move their support to the Labor Party if this repeal were to pass.

I can speculate that the number of Coalition people who care deeply about this repeal - people such as me, who would be very disgruntled with the Coalition if it wimps out on this - are a fair bit more numerous than any Coalition voters who might walk away next election if repeal is pursued.

This repeal needs to go ahead. All four aspects of this provision, the ones aimed at offending, insulting, humiliating and intimidating, they need to go. A half-hearted repeal would hardly make Brandis or the Coalition defenders of free speech and liberty. Honour your campaign pledge, Senator Brandis.

James Allan is Garrick professor of law at the University of Queensland.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/nationalaffairs/opinion/bolt-law-vow-must-be-kept/story-e6frgd0x-1226775401112#>

Danby on Discrimination

December 7, 2013 by J-Wire Staff

Federal Labor MP Michael Danby has told Parliament that the Racial Discrimination Act legislation which the current government intends to weaken, should not be changed...a view held by former Prime Minister Julia Gillard.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (09:42): I rise to take on the issue of discrimination in this country. This issue struck a chord with people overnight on my Facebook page. There, people in unprecedented numbers have been looking at the issues I have raised.

In 1995, during the Keating prime ministership, section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act was introduced into Australian legislation. For 11 years under John Howard protection against hate speech remain untouched. This raises the question: why is the current government so intent on repealing the racial discrimination legislation, which was so successful during all the years of the Howard government? The answer, unfortunately, lies in the right turn represented by this government and by their cheerleaders in the Murdoch press. Many right-wingers say that the repeal of section 18C is directly related to the conviction in court of conservative columnist, blogger and broadcaster Andrew Bolt.

A week ago today in my electorate, the former Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, was awarded the Jerusalem prize by the Australian Jewish community. During her passionate address to a packed audience, the former Prime Minister unequivocally condemned Attorney-General Brandis's plan to repeal section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act. Prime Minister Gillard voiced her support for section 18C and drew attention to the attacks on it in the Murdoch press. She said that, earlier this month, the Weekend Australian had editorialised in favour of weakening racial discrimination laws. She said:

Allow me, please, to read from their editorial—because I cannot make the argument in favour of these laws better than they have in their twisted views.

The editorial said:

"... Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act provided the foundation for a Federal Court finding in 2011 that [Andrew

Bolt's articles about light-skinned Aborigines amounted to unlawful racial vilification ...

... Bolt's columns did contain some errors of fact and they might well have caused offence—

The Australian argued—

But so what?

Former Prime Minister Gillard said:

..."so what" is nothing less than the preservation of the social fabric of respect and decency that binds all Australians, from all backgrounds, and all walks of life, together.

I could not have said it better than the former Prime Minister, who received a standing ovation for her remarks. It was a warm-hearted moment in my electorate to see so many people coming together in appreciation of the former Prime Minister and her long-standing, passionate and sincere views that were in place despite the lack of political support she had, sometimes even in her own party, on these and other issues.

The issue is not going away until the coalition, and specifically the Attorney-General, gives a guarantee to the Australian people that the Racial Discrimination Act will be left untouched. It was good enough for John Howard; I do not see why it is not good enough for this current government. I hope that wiser heads will prevail. Mr Howard was a wise man. I applaud former Prime Minister Gillard's rallying cry; her Jerusalem Prize is well deserved.

<http://www.iwire.com.au/news/danbyondiscrimination/39119>

Fredrick Töben writes two letters

**The Attorney-General
Senator George Brandis
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA**

28 November 2013

**Re: Our 17 November 2013 Melbourne meeting -
Richard Wagner THE RING GALA DINNER**

Dear Senator Brandis

Further to my email of 24 November 2013 to you I now re-submit its contents together with additional articles that augment my point about the ECAJ making a submission to you. It was this body that brought me and Adelaide Institute before HREOC-FCA, a legal persecution process that lasted for over 17 years and ended in my being bankrupted.

As advised by you I did ring your office Monday morning, 18 November 2013, to see when a meeting would fit into your busy schedule. Kate advised that nothing could be done until after 9-10 December 2013, and she would advise me accordingly.

On Friday 22 November 2013 I rang your office again and she advised that she had spoken with you and that it seems there is little prospect of my being received by you.

I did not go into the details of why I wished to see you because that matter had already been settled with you on Sunday evening.

In view of the latest article from Mr Dreyfus, I would like you to give my proposed submissions your valued consideration. Please advise.

Dr Fredrick Töben toben@toben.biz

From: Fredrick Toben [mailto:toben@toben.biz]

Sent: Thursday, 5 December 2013 12:03 PM

To: j.allan@law.uq.edu.au

Cc: senator.brandis@aph.gov.au

Subject: 'Bolt law' vow must be kept

Professor Allen – what an interesting article you've written this time, and I fully agree with you, which is a delight for me.

1. However, you fail to tell the full story of what the purpose of Section 18C was, and this former A-G Mark Dreyfus blurted out just recently. He did not hide behind the cover of that 'Bolt law' nonsense, as have a number of media writers who call themselves free expression advocates.

2. You will most likely see how Senator Brandis will repeal Section 18C but then fall into the trap of adopting what Alan Dershowitz did for the USA and for the so-called free and democratic western world – split free expression into free speech and hate speech.

3. Remember also that when the Bolshevik Jews came to power in Russia in 1917 the first thing they did was pass a law that criminalised with the death penalty the concept 'antisemite'. Anyone labelled a, anti-Semite was shot while anyone called a 'revisionist' was sent to the Gulags.

4. Would you dare focus in these important facts when next you elaborate on further attacks on our cherished free expression? I always claim that if you take away my freedom to think and to speak you take away my humanity, and you commit a crime against humanity. Truth is my defence.

Or, another of my maxims: Don't only blame the Jews, also blame those that bend to their pressure!

Kindest regards.

Fredrick Töben toben@toben.biz

Ref. Newsletters Nos: [January 671](#), [February 675](#), [March 679](#), [July 703](#) for more details on the legal battle/Senate submissions, etc.